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Towards a  
Definition of Performance Improvisation

by  
Naoko Yagi

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## Summary

This thesis discusses the interconnection of 'performance' and 'improvisation', which, despite its long and established history, has always proved difficult to definitively pin down. My research question presupposes that 'performance' and 'improvisation' are neither completely separate nor completely interchangeable. I focus on the area where 'performance' and 'improvisation' overlap each other, which I call 'performance improvisation'. The thesis seeks to answer the question, 'What can I induce from materials focussed around the individual "creativities" that might serve to construct a prototypical explanation to define "performance improvisation"?'. The main chapters interpret and analyse materials written and published between the beginning of the twentieth century and the 1990s with particular emphasis on the so-called 'theatre' and 'dance' in North America. The concluding chapter proposes oppositional features of 'performance' and 'improvisation', stating that 'performance improvisation' is a dynamic intertwinement of those features, which manifests in each individual 'creativity'. The conclusion offers a benchmark for future attempts at defining 'performance improvisation'.

A brief overview of the *commedia dell'arte* in Chapter 1 introduces the main chapters. Chapter 2 looks at the correlation of human body and mind. In Chapter 3, I discuss body and mind negotiating with and deviating from traditions and conventions. The scope of the discussion expands in Chapter 4, which considers the idea, or the concept, of 'performance' and 'improvisation' as seen by individuals. Chapter 5 looks at the audience's point of view in relation to the performer's point of view. The argument in those chapters is tested in Chapter 6 against case study materials that discuss highly experimental practices. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis, in which I answer the research question by way of proposing eight pairs of oppositional features that characterise 'performance' and 'improvisation'.



## 1 Introduction

This thesis discusses the interconnection of 'performance' and 'improvisation' which, despite its long and established history, has always proved difficult to definitively pin down. The title, Towards a Definition of Performance Improvisation, is meant to suggest that the conclusion of the research would offer a benchmark for any further attempts at defining 'performance improvisation'.

Chapter 1 will introduce the line of argument to be employed across the rest of the chapters, setting out the basis on which the research parameters, the organisation of the thesis, and the research methodologies have been devised. The discussion in the following chapters will lead to the conclusion of the thesis, whose proposals are made for establishing what I metaphorically called the benchmark in the paragraph above.

### 1.1 Research Question

#### 1.1.1 Reviewing 'Performance' and 'Improvisation' as Discussed in Literature

This sub-section of Section 1 considers some examples of the 'common usage' of the terms 'performance' and 'improvisation'.

For the purpose of helping to shape the research parameters in Section 2, examples in this sub-section are deliberately chosen from several different genres of literature: nineteenth-century novels, writings in linguistics, in aesthetics, in philosophy, in music, and in architecture. The examples cited here make their own point in the sense that, though never being irrelevant, they will not become the main subjects of the discussion in the following chapters of the thesis. I will

explain the reason in Section 2.

In Jane Austen's Mansfield Park, the younger members of the family and their friends come up with an idea that they will '[raise] a little theatre at Mansfield'.<sup>1</sup> They think about turning one of the rooms in the house into a stage with some rearrangement of the furniture and with the help of a few additional materials such as curtains (p. 149). In order to avoid a show of extravagance, one of the characters suggests that they should try 'performance' rather than 'theatre':

We must [. . .] make the performance, not the theatre, our object. Many parts of our best plays are independent of scenery [original emphases] (p. 149)

The other characters agree to the suggestion on the spot (p. 149). The novel itself does not reflect on the word 'performance' any further. The word simply passes for its 'common usage' among the characters in the novel, to the narrator in the novel, and, at least in theory, to the model<sup>2</sup> reader of the novel. In this case, the 'common usage' of 'performance' emphasises the notion of participating as an actor in a production while diminishing the weight of exterior aspects of a production, such as the embellishment of the stage.

In the field of theoretical linguistics, the term 'performance' has become part of the essential jargon as the terminological dichotomy of competence/performance suggested by Noam Chomsky has spread its influence throughout the field in the past thirty years. Irrespective of Chomsky's own theory having shifted and modified considerably in the same thirty years, one

widely-read textbook introduces a 'beginner' to Chomskyan grammar by giving a brief but succinct description of that dichotomy, which includes the following sentences:

Competence (the fluent native speaker's knowledge of the language) is contrasted by Chomsky with performance (what people actually say or understand by what someone else says on a given occasion). [. . .] Very often, performance is an imperfect reflection of competence: for example, the fact that people make occasional slips of the tongue in everyday speech does not mean that they don't know their native language, or don't have fluency (i.e. competence) in it. Slips of the tongue and like phenomena are -- for Chomsky -- performance errors [. . .]. 3

The textbook expects the 'beginner' to grasp the meaning of 'performance' in the sense that 'performance' relates to the actual moment of the speaker uttering a sentence of her native language. 'Performance' means that the speaker cannot take back what she is uttering, 'slips of the tongue' included. The influence of Chomskyan grammar on other fields of study, for example, philosophy, psychology, biology, computer science, and cognitive science, does not necessarily mean that the competence/performance dichotomy has been accepted in those fields.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to categorise various types of 'human activities'<sup>5</sup> for aesthetical discussions, Gérard Genette explains the terms 'performance' and 'improvisation' in his book, The Work of Art. The version of the book to which I am referring is a translation from the French.<sup>6</sup> According to Genette's categorisation, 'works of performance' (p. 56) include:

theater, cinema (as far as the profilmic, or what takes place on the set, is concerned), musical or poetic improvisation or performance (p. 56)



Here the term 'performance' emphasises the temporal aspect of 'human activities'. It is in being part of such 'performance' that the term 'improvisation' finds its place in Genette's categorisation. Genette suggests the two-fold nature of 'improvisation', namely, 'spontan[eity]' (p. 57) and 'a mastery born of long training' (p. 57), which associates with a classic concept of 'improvisation' detected, for example, in the discussions on the *commedia dell'arte*. The last section of this chapter will take up the *commedia dell'arte* more in detail. The 'common usage' of 'improvisation' from an aesthetical-taxonomical point of view declares that:

In practice [. . .] an improvisation [. . .] is always based to some extent either on a preexisting theme [. . .] or on a certain number of formulas or clichés; this rules out all possibility of freely inventing each moment [. . .]. (p. 58)

At the same time, Genette points out that no one within this range of performance is able to produce 'everything [. . .] on the spot' regardless of the question whether it is being improvised or not (p. 61).

Philosopher Stanley Cavell focuses on 'improvisation' in music by first assessing it diachronically around its  
7  
'convention' and then bringing it to the point at which the 'convention' becomes a question in itself. Provided that a listener of an earlier Beethoven piece is familiar with the solid convention which makes up the 'language' (p. 201) of Beethoven's music (p. 201), she may pretend, consciously or not, that the piece is 'being improvised' (p. 201). The very fact that Cavell writes on behalf of the composer, the player, and the listener

serves as a testimony to a shared understanding of that particular convention. In the later works of Beethoven, however, the term 'improvisation' starts to refer to the attempt at creating a new 'convention' as well as to the practice of an existing 'convention' (p. 201). In those later works, the question is no longer 'how to do what you want' (p. 201) but 'to know what would satisfy you' (p. 201). At that point, no one can be entirely certain of what she or he is composing/playing/listening for what kind of purpose and within what kind of framework. When that happens, according to Cavell, 'improvisation' virtually ceases to function as a term; the word is now deprived of a context that people could share.

Jacques Derrida describes 'improvisation' in Points . . . ., a collection of interviews published in print. I use a version<sup>8</sup> which is a translation from the French. While explaining 'improvisation', Derrida points to the fact that the interview is being recorded,<sup>9</sup> that the 'tape does not wait' (p. 32), and that 'there is no time to look for the right words' (p. 32). Such comments foreground the fact that he is actually experiencing what he is describing, namely, 'improvisation'. According to Derrida, 'improvisation' is what a person gives away even when she tries to hide it. When he says, 'Even if I decided not to answer your [the interviewer's] questions, [. . .] I will have responded in any case' (p. 35), Derrida is a living testimony to his own comment. To Derrida, an 'improvised exposition' (p. 49) never equals an 'absolutely spontaneous, instantaneous, almost simultaneous response' (p. 49). Since the respondent herself

always activates some kind of 'defense' (p. 49) mechanism against making such a total 'response', the 'defense' in turn reveals her so-called self (pp. 49-50). In that sense, the 'defense' is not defending her. Derrida's 'improvisation' particularly emphasises a person's desire to reveal or to conceal something, a desire that always 'reveals' everything anyway.

Finally, I quote from a paragraph in an introductory book on architecture:

[. . .] the architect's work is intended to live on into a distant future. He sets the stage for a long, slowmoving performance which must be adaptable enough to accommodate unforeseen improvisation. His building should preferably be ahead of its time when planned so that it will be in keeping with the times as long as it stands. [my emphases] 10

The terms 'performance' and 'improvisation' function as theatrical metaphors in the context of the architect 'set[ting] the stage', or designing a building. Behind those metaphors lurks a concept that associates with a Shakespearean cliché, the 'world' being a 'stage'. The 'common usage' of 'performance' and 'improvisation' in this case presents an image of an architectural building as a designated space for its occupants to live comfortably, actively, and also in a flexible manner.

### 1.1.2 Creativity

The 'common usage' of 'performance' and 'improvisation' manifests<sup>11</sup> what the linguist George Lakoff calls a 'creative enterprise'.

Lakoff contends that whereas we form a 'concept of what a table is' (p. 175) by exercising 'the commonsense psychology [. . .] of objectivist cognition' (p. 175), our attempts at categorising the terms in some 'other domains' (p. 175) inevitably involve



'providing an alternative to the classical theory of categorisation' (p. 175):

I have a concept of what a table is. That concept corresponds to tables, not to tigers, clouds, or baseball gloves. [. . .] The word 'table' in English designates tables; it doesn't designate elephants or roses or automobiles. [. . .] But such commonsense assumptions about physical objects do not necessarily extend to other domains. When we use them to deal with political movements, inflation, friendships, marriage, our emotions, and our foreign policy, the results are not always happy ones. In such cases, the entities and properties are by no means so clear, nor is the distinction between what is essential and what is accidental. (p. 175)

The examples we saw in the previous sub-section give us a preliminary understanding that both 'performance' and 'improvisation' belong to the realm outside what Lakoff calls 'physical objects', or specific and clear 'entities' and 'properties'. While the writers agree that 'performance' and 'improvisation' directly involve the human body and mind as well as her environs, they take 'alternative' and 'creative' views, to use Lakoff's words, in defining what they regard as 'performance' and 'improvisation'. The question is: What kind of creativity does it take for people to utter and write the terms 'performance' and 'improvisation'?

The whole point of such 'creativity' resides in the fact that it depends on each individual, not 'people' as a group, to 'create' the 'theory' of categorisation. This brings about a problem of its own. One salient problem has to do with the possibility that an individual in her writing or utterance may decide not to use the terms 'performance' and 'improvisation' while some external factors formally or even 'casually' put her

writing or utterance in the context of the 'common usage' of 'performance' or 'improvisation'. I will give two examples of such individual 'creativity'.

Allan Kaprow in his article, 'Just Doing', presents his own account of 'experimental art'<sup>12</sup> by claiming that '[a]rt is [. . .] easily forgotten. And that is the condition for experimentation: the art is the forgetting of art' (p. 103). Kaprow in this particular article cites the word 'performance' for the purpose of making it part of a disclaimer:

The playground for experimental art is ordinary life. But playing in this ordinary world does not mean including even more features of the commonplace than we are already used to finding in exhibitions, concerts, poems, dances, films, and performances. Such appropriations are the traditional strategies that turn life into art. [. . .] In contrast, the experimental artist who plays with the commonplace does so in the very midst of crossing the street or tying a shoelace. There is no excerpting and reenacting them on a stage, no documenting them for a show. (p. 103)

While the article clearly points out that what Kaprow calls 'experimental art' is different from what he calls 'performance', the fact remains that the article itself appeared in TDR, a journal devoted to 'performance studies'. In that context, Kaprow's notion of 'experimental art' is subsumed, at least on the printed page of the journal, under the concept of 'performance' which is being created heuristically by the editors, contributors, and the readers of the journal.

The other example is a painter's brief comment on one of his still lifes. The painting by Togyu Okumura, entitled 'A Tureen from Spain', and the painter's very short comment on it, 'I had an opportunity to borrow this tureen from someone. In it I

arranged a branch of karin [a kind of pear]', appear on the same  
 page of the catalogue for one of his retrospectives.<sup>13</sup> The  
 translation is from the Japanese.<sup>14</sup> The verbal reference to  
 arranging karin is crucial in the sense that it foregrounds the  
 action of the painter who, for the specific purpose of working on  
 the painting, deliberately put the branch in the way it shows in  
 the painting. In that context, the painting can be 'read' in  
 line with Genette's description of 'performance': the painter  
 performs according to a convention of preparing objects for a  
 still life, and the ultimate result is that particular painting.  
 I will explain in Section 2 why the following chapters of the  
 thesis will not discuss paintings per se.

The question, 'What kind of creativity does it take for  
 people to utter and write the terms "performance" and  
 "improvisation"?', can be rephrased: What are the individual  
 creativities that form, directly or indirectly, the terms  
 'performance' and 'improvisation'? Methods such as citing  
 everything that contains the words 'performance' and  
 'improvisation', which, at least in theory, could be done by using  
 a computer, will inevitably fail; they would disregard the kind  
 of discussion induced by materials that do not employ those  
 words. On the other hand, we shall have absolutely no  
 interpretational or analytical criteria if we choose to extend  
 the range of discussion as far as all individual writings and  
 utterances that only contextually suggest their association with  
 the 'common usage' of 'performance' and 'improvisation'.

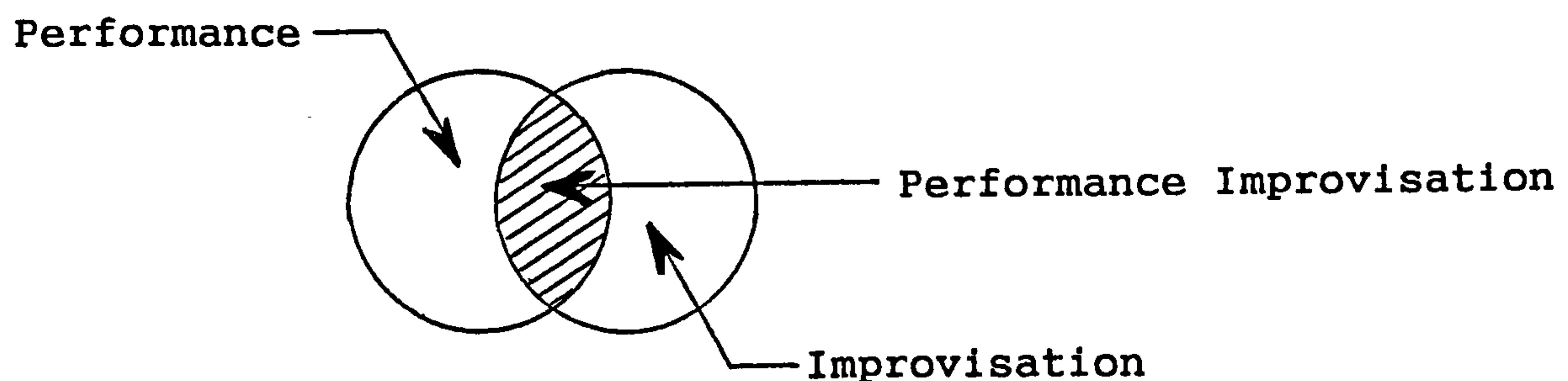
Only a subtlety of interpretation and of analysis will assess  
 each case of individual 'creativity'; at the same time, such



subtlety can never be practical for a single research unless the researcher sets a limit to the range of discussion. In the next sub-section, I will ask the research question, which is my criterion of setting a limit to my discussion of 'performance' and 'improvisation'.

### 1.1.3 Raising the Research Question

My research question presupposes that 'performance' and 'improvisation' are not completely separate nor are they completely interchangeable. Nor is it the case that either 'performance' or 'improvisation' in its entirety forms part of the other. 'Performance' and 'improvisation' partly invade each other, which is the area of 'performance and improvisation'. I will call that area 'performance improvisation'. By that term I therefore do not mean that the word 'performance' necessarily functions as an adjective for the word 'improvisation'. The shaded area shown below refers to 'performance improvisation':



The research question for the thesis is:

What can I induce from materials focussed around the individual 'creativities' that might serve to construct a prototypical explanation to define 'performance improvisation'?

The next three sections will describe an actual process of limiting the range of discussion: by specifying the research

parameters, the organisation of the thesis, and the research methodologies, I will be able to focus sharply on the research question and also to bring the quantity of research materials down to an appropriate size.

I will also briefly review the principles and the practice of the *commedia dell'arte* in Section 5 of this chapter. The research materials in the Chapters 2 to 6 mention the *commedia dell'arte* as a typical example of the traditional forms of 'performance' and 'improvisation'. The research itself will not centre around the *commedia dell'arte*.

## 1.2 Research Parameters

The main chapters of the thesis, Chapters 2 to 6, will be an interpretation and analysis of:

Materials written and published during the span between the beginning of this century and the 1990s

and also of:

Materials on 'theatre' and 'dance' in North America as they are so labelled in the books and the journals in which they appear

Transcribed interviews and lectures will be included in the materials for discussion. Materials will be in English, either  
15  
originally or in translation.

Written materials have an advantage over non-written materials in explicitly revealing two particular aspects of human activity, which have a particular relevance to my research question. First, the medium of writing can focus on the process of human activity as well as the result of it. Second, the

medium of writing can explain the kind of human activity to which well-established rules do not apply. While it is possible to describe or demonstrate well-established rules by means of charts, scores, formulae, drawings, photographs, film, and non-verbal, physical demonstrations, it is only through the medium of writing that rules which are not well-established can be explained unambiguously. For example, Barbara Carlisle describes how she directed at her home a series of plays written by herself:

[. . .] Wine took place in a corner of the living room, with the concerts [. . .] represented by two chairs against one wall and the restaurants [. . .] by a small table and two chairs [. . .]. We played the concert music. [. . .] The actors were always in character when in view and treated the spectators as fellow concertgoers or restaurant patrons. 16

Other media like photographs and film would not be able to show clearly some of the important rules in the play such as the actors 'always' being 'in character when in view' even though they are not physically separated, as in a traditional theatre, from the spectators. A photograph or film would let the rules blend with other factors of human activity, making the division between them too ambiguous to detect.

I will consider published written materials throughout the discussion in order to have consistency in the interpretative and analytical procedures. 'Raw' materials like handwritten or typed memos, letters, and various kinds of drafts all demand the kind of deciphering procedures which necessitates a specially developed technique. In that respect, 'raw' written materials resemble non-written materials such as charts, drawings,



paintings, photographs, and film, which would all require specialised interpretative techniques.

The research parameters stated at the beginning of this section meet the following three provisions I have set for my source materials.

The first provision is that the materials deal with human activity at the level of the argument that is neither overtly scientific nor overtly philosophical. The competence/performance dichotomy in linguistics, aesthetic problems, and a play on words as seen in Derrida, all taken up in the previous section, will be regarded as being too scientific and too philosophical to constitute the main subjects of the discussion in the following chapters. Instead, science and philosophy will appear in the chapters indirectly or briefly in order to support the discussion of the materials.

Specificity is the second provision for the materials. In order to maintain a subtlety of interpretation and analysis, the materials have to be specific enough to encourage a non-metaphorical discussion. In that respect, the last example in the previous section, a paragraph from a book on architecture, is too rich in metaphor.

The third provision requires that the materials come from a set period of time and that they directly or indirectly relate to a set region. An investigation into individual 'creativities', as stated in the research question, calls for a collection of materials which clearly distinguishes small differences between each 'creativity'. That above all demands a substantial number

of cases. It is also crucial that the materials reflect the authors' diverse professional positions and their diverse purposes in publishing. In a thesis of this length, the materials can be rich in quantity as well as in diversity only when we set a chronological-regional target for them.

This century has seen practitioners, critics, academics, non-academics, professionals, and non-professionals all write publicly, and often for the same journals, about various types and processes of human activity, which in effect has proven that established rules would hardly apply to all who wish to discuss such matters in writing. It is particularly in the fields of so-called 'theatre' and so-called 'dance' in North America that diversity in writing, namely, everyone writing about her subject in her own way, has been most striking. In the following chapters, we will discuss anecdotes, teaching instructions, in-depth case studies, 'personal' comments, and more theorised comments, which all reflect people's diverse positions and viewpoints when they write and publish in the fields of so-called 'theatre' and so-called 'dance' in North America in this century.

In the following chapters, roughly half of all the materials will not mention North American theatre or dance. Those materials will discuss practices and theories developed in the course of this century in Europe, and in Britain, and refer directly or indirectly to what they regard as non-European forms of practices. Such theories and practices will be crucial, since they will characteristically relate to the very nature of North American theatre and dance.

### 1.3 The Organisation of the Thesis

The main discussion in the following chapters, Chapters 2 to 6, will be organised around two overall principles:

Starting with a close interpretation and analysis of the interaction of human body and mind, the discussion will gradually expand its scope to interpret and analyse a person or people making or participating in 'theatre' and 'dance', in 'performance' and 'improvisation'

Case study materials will appear side by side with the material on more general and theoretical issues

Chapter 2 will be a close interpretation and analysis of material dealing with how a human being correlates her body with her mind. Chapter 3 will not only discuss the way human body and human mind negotiate with some existent forms, traditions, and texts but also the way in which human body and human mind search for rules of their own. In Chapter 4, the scope of the discussion will expand further to consider the idea, or the concept, of 'performance' and of 'improvisation' as seen by individuals. Chapter 5 will extend the scope of the discussion as far as the audience's point of view in relation to the performer's point of view. Chapter 6 will be the only chapter in which case study materials will dominate the material on more general and theoretical issues. The argument of the preceding chapters will be tested in Chapter 6 against material that discusses highly experimental 'performance' practices. By organising the chapters in such an order, the later chapters will be able to develop their argument on a firm understanding that individual 'creativities' always start with individual bodies and minds making specific decisions at specific 'moments'.



#### 1.4 Methodologies for Interpreting and Analysing Source Materials

The purpose of building interpretative and analytical methods is to construct the main chapters in such a way that they will smoothly introduce the final chapter, in which I will attempt to answer the research question, 'What can I induce from materials focussed around the individual "creativities" that might serve to construct a prototypical explanation to define "performance improvisation"?'. .

The methods for interpreting the source materials will function alongside the methods for analysing them. Interpretation of a single piece of written material will come before analysis of the same piece only in the sense that the material will be 'read' first according to what each chapter focuses on and then according to the question of 'looking for a prototype of performance improvisation'. The weight of interpretative or analytical methods will differ from source to source. The distinction between interpretation and analysis will be fairly clear in some examples, while in other examples it will be impossible to divide the two. It is only through such a flexible procedure of interpretation and analysis that the discussion can fully advance the important aspect of the research question, namely, paying close attention to differences between individual 'creativities'.

In the following chapters, to interpret the materials means to read the materials in the framework of each chapter. This type of reading will rely on two criteria in my discussion.

The first criterion is that, for the two reasons stated

below, I will not divide the source material into primary and secondary sources. One of the reasons has to do with the fact that my discussion will only refer to the published material. Strictly speaking, every piece of material in the following chapters will belong to the category of secondary sources, since the published material is not 'performance' or 'improvisation' or 'performance improvisation' itself. The other reason has to do with a possible hierarchical inference regarding 'primary' and 'secondary' sources, that the former seemingly exert more authority than the latter. My discussion will investigate the nature of individual 'creativities', to which extent no particular material will enjoy any kind of 'centrality' or 'directness' over the other materials. Chapter 6 will be an exception: it will treat case study materials as having some authority over other sources.

The second criterion concerns the so-called factual reliability of the source material. In the following chapters, the material will not be read for 'fact'-finding purposes. The discussion will focus on the literary aspects of the material rather than emphasising factors such as when the book or the article in question was published and whether it deals with its contemporaries or deals with the past. I will read each piece of material by paying particular attention to the way the words and terms have been chosen, to the way in which sentences are structured, to the writing style, and to the scope of the given source.

In my discussion, to analyse the materials means to read them in such a way that they suit the framework of the research

question. Terminology is crucial when we analyse the pieces of material one by one. Some pieces adopt the word 'performance' or the word 'improvisation' or both. There are pieces that do not use the word 'performance' or the word 'improvisation' and adopt other terms instead. When reading materials that use the words 'performance' and 'improvisation', I will reassess the words not simply within the context of individual materials but also in a larger context, that is, North American 'theatre' and 'dance' as a whole. I will show that the words 'performance' and 'improvisation' have allowed enormous potential in the theory and practice of North American 'theatre' and 'dance' in this century. When introducing materials that do not use the words 'performance' and 'improvisation', I will reassess the contexts that render words or expressions other than 'performance' and 'improvisation' against some contexts of the materials that adopt the words 'performance' and 'improvisation'. Analysis will be conducted at every possible level of the material, that is, at the word level or at the sentence level or at the paragraph level or at the level of an entire piece of material.

In Chapter 7, I will conclude the discussion. The argument in the Chapters 2 to 6 will be reassessed according to the research question raised in Section 1 of this chapter. I will answer the research question, state the significance of that answer, and make a proposal for future attempts at defining 'performance improvisation'.

### 1.5 Commedia dell'Arte

As a starting point in our attempt to define performance



improvisation, we take a look at the principles and the practice of the *commedia dell'arte*.

The 'traditional' features of the *commedia dell'arte* can be detected in its mode of existence: 'a theatre of professional actors, whereas the literary Italian theatre, the "*commedia emdita*", was performed by court functionaries or members of

academies.'<sup>17</sup> The fact that the actors were professionals does not matter in itself; what is crucial seems to be that those groups of professional actors inhabited a 'tradition'.

'Tradition' is discussed by Richard Schechner as follows with regard to 'repertory':

Without a repertory and a basic training technique we stumble into a 'once only' aesthetic without consciously choosing it. [. . .] Without vision and technique we get what we've got: bursts of energy, sometimes extremely creative, followed by sputtering inconsistency, unplanned discontinuity rationalized after the fact. 18

Although the direction of Schechner's experimental theatre cannot be equated with that of the *commedia dell'arte*, we find that the 'tradition' in Schechner's sense was in fact inherent in the *commedia dell'arte*:

Like all theatrical companies of the period, *commedia dell'arte* troupes played a repertory, an accumulation of entertainments, and there is every reason to believe that once a particular piece had been worked out to the satisfaction of all through improvisation, it joined the repertory to be played as finished work. On the other hand, the possibility of improvisation always must have been present in the consciousness of the actors, who no doubt continued to improve on their work with a new joke, an unexpected punch line, or a reference to a local scandal picked up that morning in a tavern. 19

'Repertory' formed a 'core' of the *commedia dell'arte*, to which was added improvisation for the 'improvement' of their theatre.

The commedia dell'arte being conspicuously dependent on each performer's improvising skill is delved deeper into by Jean-Louis Barrault, who seems to suggest that improvisation for the commedia dell'arte quite plainly meant an occasion to display a performer's 'being': 'it is only when one has perfect control of one's body, feelings and mind, and when one is fully prepared to meet any situation, that one can talk of improvisation. The Commedia dell'Arte can therefore only be practised by the "Complete Actor", and it is the kind of theatre which compels the actor to get to the pitch of his "own true personality"<sup>20</sup>'. Such requirements for the performers meant that the performers were expected to be sensitive and responsive both mentally and physically to as many different situations as possible inside and outside theatre. Developing flexibility through their own personalities could complement the nature of their acting. The constant 'improvement' trend, whether or not it was in fact regarded as an improvement by the audience, by itself signified the enactment of 'tradition'.

A performer's accomplished skill principally belonged to 'literate', or textually-based, ways of transmission in the commedia dell'arte; a 'text' did not have to be, for example, a publishable script, but it had to function as a 'language', by means of which performers and the audience communicated. The language in that sense existed as rules bound by the society as well as by the culture, and improvisation was used in the commedia dell'arte on the basis of form, group-work, or trial-and-error:



What the actors of the *commedia dell'arte* achieved was the generation of plays without the use of a playwright. The plays were constructed, for the most part, from known elements, verbal and physical. Actors retained a store of amorous arias and dialogues, tirades and harangues, rodomontades, imbroglios, and puns, often recorded in 'zibaldoni', or actors' notebooks, while the zanni also hoarded lazzi, standard comic routines featuring beatings, chases, pratfalls, scatology, obscenity, and roguery of all sorts. [. . .] The actors brought to the creation of the piece characters whose behavior was known and predictable, characters 'accumulated' over the years both by those actors and by their predecessors and contemporaries. Circumstances, events, and relationships could differ from play to play, but the essential personalities of the characters provided a stable foundation. 21

According to Domenico Pietropaolo, systematisation of improvisatory actions was established to such an extent in the *commedia dell'arte* that it is possible to analyse the *commedia's* improvisation as 'a process of composition -- aiming, that is, at the formation of composite units by the addition of discrete parts. And this means that improvisation is not an elementary and self-contained notion but a relational concept.' <sup>22</sup> He then semiotically clarifies what exactly was going on among performers when they were improvising:

In the simplest case possible in a dialogue situation, [improvisation] involves at least two variables, which it grafts onto one another in the formation of stimulus-and-response elementary units of communication: given the stimulus produced by one character, the process of improvisation must determine the textually appropriate response of his interlocutor, which is then regarded as another stimulus, itself awaiting a response to the evolving script. (p. 168)

The performers in the *commedia dell'arte* abided by the rules so that people could understand the meaning of the performers' actions; at the same time, it was also the only means of realising improvisation. The choice, in other words, had already



been laid out for the performers based on their respective 'potential range of competence' (p. 169). What remained to be done was for each performer to 'materialise' the choice by picking up a certain combination of variables. Making 'right' choices proved the performer's 'talent' and the resultant choices themselves revealed how 'competent' the performers were. Meanwhile, the nature of improvisation demanded that such choices would be made almost instantly, although pending a further refinement; the 'choice', then, looked more like instinctive, or reflexive, action and reaction. Performers' 'talent' in the *commedia dell'arte* at least partly included their ability to respond reflexively or instantaneously without a prior arrangement.

The system of working within agreed-upon rules made it easier for performers of the *commedia dell'arte* to construct a production while 'correctly' anticipating a particular reaction from the audience. A moment of surprise, for example, could be enacted by a performer who seemingly deviated from the established rules; the performer could control how far that deviation would go, and the impact of which upon the audience the performer could foresee. Pietropaolo explains:

A performer must, in fact, decide whether to surprise the audience by producing the least expected response or to give them exactly what they expect along with the pleasure that comes with the sense of having made an accurate prediction. [. . .] Between the two extremes of, on the one hand, predictability [. . .] and, on the other hand, unpredictability [. . .] there may already be a number of repertory options available to the actor, who can, in any case, give rise to a quasi-continuum of solutions by making small modifications to his standard responses in order to make them suitable for the occasion. (p. 172)

Improvisation for performers of the commedia dell'arte meant an intricate skein of conscious or subconscious decision making, the result of which would always be a manifestation of 'play[ing] the moment'<sup>23</sup> both for the performers and the audience. People clearly appreciated such 'moments'; there otherwise would have been no need for a deliberate inclusion of improvisatory actions in a production.

## 2 Performer's Body and Mind

A performer makes mental and physical decisions in the 'moment' of performing as we have seen with performers of the *commedia dell'arte*. Here we will more closely delve into the mechanism of how exactly a performer not only in the *commedia* but in any kind of performance co-ordinates her own body and mind. Our question will especially centre around how a performer 'trains' her mind and body so that they will be ready for any possible improvisatory occasions.

### 2.1 On Technique

After Grotowski, we can see a performer as what she is: 'Theatre people themselves do not usually have an altogether clear conception of theatre. To the average actor the theatre is first and foremost himself, and not what he is able to achieve by means of his artistic technique. He -- his own private organism -- is the theatre'.<sup>1</sup> A performer always starts with being the performer 'herself'. She builds up the 'moment' of performance based on her body and mind. A performer cannot be less than 'herself'. This does not necessarily mean that a performer's 'moment' will always be a kind of 'extra' work added on to her natural self. Simply because a performer's self is so complex and potentially so rich in nature, even the plain posture of standing is a complicated work of the performer's being 'herself', that is, her body and mind functioning in an intricate way.

When a performer makes decisions in performance practice, she is going through what Viola Spolin calls a 'creative experience',



which is 'penetration into the environment, total organic involvement with it. This means involvement on all levels: intellectual, physical, and intuitive'.<sup>2</sup> Body and mind seem to be inseparable rather than exclusive to each other. Susan Melrose puts the relationship between body and mind this way: 'the body often knows what the conscious mind does not know it knows -- or will not say. One of the most useful aspects of Halliday's [M. A. K. Halliday] functional grammar for our present purposes comes from his focus on process: the cryptogrammar "construct[s] reality by not describing" but by enacting it'.<sup>3</sup> Melrose seems to imply here that 'body' is capable of practising what 'mind' does not necessarily clarify. Spolin explains the 'intuitive' level: 'When response to experience takes place at this intuitive level, when a person functions beyond a constricted intellectual plane, he is truly open for learning' (p. 4). Especially when the time given to a performer is limited as in most of the fragmentary circumstances of improvisation, decision-making by the performer often strongly relies on this 'intuitive' level of experience. In such cases, a performer's technique in making decisions gets both demanding and vital, hence 'truly open for learning'.

A performer practises within space and time. Her decision-making first of all has to follow the laws of nature, which limit the range of what she can do with her own body and mind. On the other hand, decision-making in performance is helped by such unavoidable natural boundaries. If a performer willingly goes along with the current natural limitations facing her, her body and mind will operate in a relaxed and smooth manner of

performance rather than in a rigid one. It is not unlike when we lie down when feeling too tired to be on our feet. A performer can also try to resist the laws of nature, although, whatever she does, she will never actually succeed in making an absolute resistance. A performer, for example, may jump high in the air and try to stay in the air as long as she can, which requires a certain amount of technique on the part of her body. Trying to resist the laws of nature is one way of using the limitations inherent in them, in which sense a certain resistance may be used to a performer's advantage. Rudolf Laban points out that '[t]he use of movement for a definite purpose, either as a means for external work or for the mirroring of certain states and attitudes of mind, derives from a power of a hitherto unexplained nature'.<sup>4</sup> This 'power' of an 'unexplained nature' is explained by Laban as follows:

One cannot say that this power is unknown, because we are able to observe it in various degrees of perfection wherever life exists.

What we can clearly see is that this power enables us to choose between a resisting, constricting, withholding, fighting attitude, or one of yielding, enduring, accepting, indulging in relation to the 'motion factors' of Weight, Space and Time to which, being natural accidents, inanimate objects are subjected. This freedom of choice is not always consciously or voluntarily exercised; it is often applied automatically without any contribution of conscious willing. But we can observe consciously the function of choosing movements appropriate to situations; that means that we can become conscious of our choice, and can investigate why we so choose. We can observe whether people yield to the accidental forces of weight, space, and time, as well as to the natural flow of movement in the sense of having a bodily feeling of them, or whether they fight against one or more of these factors by actively resisting them. (pp. 23-24)

A performer makes 'right' choices according to her adequate appreciation of what that 'power' is capable of. The question,



then, will be what kind of 'choices' a performer makes in each performance, which, according to Laban, we will be able to describe 'consciously' even if the performance itself might take place 'unconsciously'. Contact improvisation, described by Cynthia J. Novack, can be regarded as a clear-cut example of the kind of performance in which the laws of nature are fully explored both 'acceptably' and 'resistantly':

In some sense, the body and movement itself in contact improvisation are also synonymous with nature, because they follow natural laws of gravity, momentum, inertia, and so on. Feeling (physically) those forces, becoming swept away by disorientation [. . .], represents a reality to the contact improviser which takes precedence over movement based on ideas (mind) separate from body, or feeling (emotion) separate from body. It is interesting that oneness with nature connects with both calm peacefulness and wild disorientation. The shared attribute of both is that mind and culture are receding and allowing body and nature to take over, bringing out the best aspects of the person. 5

Novack reiterates the existence of a strong relationship between 'body and movement' and 'nature' in contact improvisation, seemingly suggesting that 'mind' hardly has anything to do with a contact improviser's movement. 'Choices' made by a contact improviser at each moment of her performance will be 'intuitive' ones coming out of her trained and highly responsive body. The body frees itself from heavy thinking in mind and instead responds to whatever stimuli it senses before the owner of the body actually assesses and analyses the whole procedure of that response. A contact improviser may then not be acutely 'conscious', in Laban's sense, about their bodily movement while performing. This in turn highlights a dancer's experience, her skill and dexterity, and so on, since the range of choices is an



instant reflex of what she has learned so far. Meanwhile, a contact improviser has to maintain the kind of 'mind' which keeps the on-going performance within the framework, or the general 'rule', of contact improvisation. Since bodily movement directly builds up contact improvisation, the 'mind' which frames the performance is not separate from body. Decision-making in contact improvisation thus concerns however vague an idea on the part of the performer about the general 'form' of contact improvisation, which the performer heuristically presents by using her body intuitively.

While making decisions, a performer is 'showing' her decisions. As Jon Whitmore sums up:

One of the unique features of a theater performance, which distinguishes it from literature and most other art forms, is that a performance does not describe action or events or objects but, for the most part, shows them. This is the most primitive form of signification, which is known in philosophy as ostension.  
6

Sartre on a character in drama points out:

Someone is placed in a certain situation with his conflicts and, as a result, he is an individual. But individuals are actually far more complex than that, and their situation comes from their past, their contradictions, and the various pressures upon them. This can be rendered by the novel, but it is too complicated to be rendered in two and a half hours in the theater. On the other hand, what you present is immediate individuation; but if you do, it is through immediate action, that is to say drama. A person is defined as such or such because he is in such or such a conflict, a narrowly defined conflict. 7

Body and mind always show in everyday life whether intentionally or unintentionally. Once in a performance framework, how a performer connects body and mind becomes important. Julian Beck

expects a performer to 'make clear' what she does:

Specialized experience like sponges of blue ink tossed onto green glass can fascinate eyes, but the person who throws the sponge is always more interesting than the splashing ink. The problem is to make a theatre in which this is clear. Your hand lifting the familiar coffee cup to your lip is more than a vermillion streak in the evening sky: whatever you do beats any scenery, this must be made clear. If we are to survive the landscape. 8

The 'showing' of decision-making is vital for the performer herself before it bears meanings to anyone else. Showing her decision-making gives a performer a basis to move on to the next moment, when she will have to make another decision.

A 'clear' decision often has to be made instantly in the course of performance, improvisation being a blatant example. Erving Goffman's account seems relevant here:

[. . .] if the individual's activity is to become significant to others, he must mobilize his activity so that it will express during the interaction what he wishes to convey. In fact, the performer may be required not only to express his claimed capacities during the interaction but also to do so during a split second in the interaction. 9

Body and mind work 'during a split second' so that the result of the work will 'show' without further delay, or more precisely, almost the instant of that split second. As Goffman further points out, such split-second decision-making in the framework of performance requires a certain technique and thus is not for everyone to execute easily:

[. . .] individuals often find themselves with the dilemma of expression versus action. Those who have the time and talent to perform a task well may not, because of this, have the time or talent to make it apparent that they are performing well. (p. 33)

Whether or not such a decision-making will be accomplished



depends first on how quickly her mind and body stimulate and respond; secondly, it will depend on how effectively or efficiently the resultant 'show'-ing will be sensed by the others involved in the performance and also by the performer herself. The technique for an instant, clear decision-making in performance differs from how an instant, clear decision-making arises in everyday life. The technique required of a performer in a performance will by itself be an object of appreciation or criticism, in other words, by itself be a performance. In everyday life, a decision-making will usually be appreciated for its worth only after the result of that decision is known and evaluated. The equal importance of decision-making itself and the result of the decision-making in performance means that a performer's body and mind have to be specifically fit for performance circumstances, hence the need for technique specifically required in performance. Melrose implies this kind of technique by confirming that an 'intuitive' action in performance actually indicates a performer's technique:

In theatre terms, 'intuitive acting' is a matter of internalisation of additional somatic and psychological codes, to those internalised through the habitus. What the 'intuitive' professional actor indicates through her use of the term is probably that her operative modes are not formulated discursively; but this does not mean for an instant that they are not formulated and schooled somatically and theatrically. Theatrical coding overcodes the 'everyday-spontaneous' practice, in such a way that it overlays the latter, pointing up some of its elements, exposing others, lending them then to critical in(tro)spection. 10

A performer's technique in performance will always be built upon what that performer goes through in her everyday life, that is,



what she is. The technique for performing 'overcodes' a performer's 'being'. Irene Mawer explains technique when she discusses what she calls 'artistic value':

Just as we speak with slightly different intention and with artistic significance when we employ speech to move an audience to laughter or to tears, so must gesture, whether occupational or speech, be more emphatic, and more perfectly produced, with definite artistic value, than the movements which we use in the ordinary performance of everyday occupations. The real appreciation of this point will help the student to be clear upon the difficult question of complete naturalism versus the 'exaggeration' which appears at first sight to the performer. 11

'Artistic' value judgement aside, it seems that Mawer stresses the importance of a performer's technique 'overcoding' everyday-life actions. In this sense, what we call a performer's technique can be considered as an appropriate functioning of the relationship between a performer's response and her stimulus, which she innately possesses but which will be 'improved' and 'revealed' to fit any performance circumstances through training, experience, or so-called talent. Furthermore, a warning against 'exaggeration' implies that a performer's job is to use her body and mind appropriately, that is, clearly but not overly so.

Although a clear, instant decision-making does not necessarily have to be intelligence-oriented, such a decision will always have within its grasp a 'form', or a general idea, of the performance. A performer will subconsciously be 'aware' of the body's functioning properly/improperly in the current situation. If the well-refined stimulus-response relationship between body and mind will indeed be called technique, then 'awareness' towards 'form' can also be regarded as part of the stimulus-response mechanism, in particular what body and mind can

remember and can foresee. The term 'body-thinking' is described by Melrose as 'a proto-somantic sketching of image and actional potential in space and time and in relation to others and to objects, in minimal but telling detail'.<sup>12</sup> As is flatly noted here, somatics actually can function for a performer 'automatically' (p. 90), which suggests that this 'body-thinking' may literally mean a performer's body working of its own volition without the mind's conscious instructions. Then, being aware of the form of the performance would not imply more than the fact that neither a performer's body nor her mind is unconscious. The difference between such 'awareness' and what Shomit Mitter describes in terms of 'conscious awareness' with regard to Stanislavski can be seen in Mitter's definition of the term:

Most actors know that the more one thinks about what one is doing, the more difficult it is to do it. The more clearly one works out what one is going to do on stage, the worse the result. A conscious awareness of the image that is required leads actors to imitate it rather than to live through the experience of which that image should naturally be the creative result. This suggests that the failure of the Stanislavsky system is likely to have been a result of its cerebral approach to characterization. By recommending that actors consciously imbibe the psychology of their characters, Stanislavsky may be seen as having created a situation in which his actors were more likely to experience self-consciousness than transformation into character.<sup>13</sup>

'Conscious awareness' here refers to the kind of awareness heavily inclined to a performer's mind; a performer's 'self' will be focussed on, questioned by the performer herself, and forcibly driven to try to be some other 'self', all by means of 'cerebral' thinking. Mitter seems to imply that a performer's mind ceases to connect to her body once her use of mind goes beyond the field of 'experience'. The 'experience' here can be rephrased as the



presence of a stimulus-response relationship between body and mind. In the kind of awareness which a performer retains when making quick, clear decisions, the performer's mind never slows down the decision-making or interferes with the clarity of the 'showing' aspect of that decision.

To live a 'moment', a performer will have to acquire the kind of technique which will allow her body and mind to be flexible enough to use the laws of nature to her advantage, to be decisive and overt enough to 'show' her decisions clearly, to be sensitive enough to function quickly, and to be well-balanced enough to keep her decisions manoeuvring within whatever framework the performer sets for the performance. We find that Moshe Feldenkrais in effect describes such a technique when he defines what he calls 'self-image':

Our self-image consists of four components that are involved in every action: movement, sensation, feeling, and thought. The contribution of each of the components to any particular action varies, just as the persons carrying out the action vary, but each component will be present to some extent in any action.

In order to think, for instance, a person must be awake, and know that he is awake and not dreaming; that is, he must sense and discern his physical position relative to the field of gravity. It follows that movement, sensing, and feeling are also involved in thinking.

In order to feel angry or happy, a man must be in a certain posture, and in some kind of relationship to another being or object. That is, he must also move, sense, and think.

In order to sense -- see, hear, or touch -- a person must be interested, startled, or aware of some happening that involves him. That is, he must move, feel, and think.

In order to move, he must use at least one of his senses, consciously or unconsciously, which involves feeling and thinking.

When one of these elements of action becomes so minute as almost to disappear, existence itself may be endangered. It is difficult to survive for even brief periods without any movement at all. There is no life where a being is deprived of all senses. Without feeling, there is no drive to live; it is the feeling of suffocation that forces us to breathe. Without at



least some minimum of reflex thought, even a beetle cannot live too long. 14

We may have to bear in mind that especially where somatics is concerned, there can hardly be any 'writerly or scriptural economy of mainstream learning and transmission',<sup>15</sup> as Melrose asserts. Instead, somatics 'begins its function as "something like" the anecdote' (p. 83). Technique cannot be mapped out for every performer's consultation in the first place.

Regarding technique in general, V. Kristi explains Stanislavski's conversion, as it were, from an overt 'psychological approach' to an approach which to a great extent leans on the physical movement of a performer:

Realizing that dramatic action combined the physical and psychological, Stanislavski at last came to the conclusion that it was easier to achieve this -- unity through a physical than through a psychological approach. He confessed the error of his previous attempts to establish the creative state divorced from concrete action, and became increasingly convinced that the analysis and the synthesis, the experience and the incarnation, are a single simultaneous process, and not different stages of it as he had thought before. 16

Granted that 'dramatic action' in the Stanislavskian sense does not in its entirety conform to the kind of improvisatory technique which we are here discussing, we can still see that Stanislavski 'at last' crosses the line which divides a psychological approach, his prominent 'technique' till now, from a physical approach. Kristi seems to assert that the conversion is done not for a total and complete change of attitude towards performance on Stanislavski's part but rather as a result of his search for an 'easier', and presumably more effective, way to produce 'dramatic action' out of a performer. A physical

approach for Stanislavski does not end in exploring a performer's body; a performer uses this approach primarily as a pragmatic means of reaching a 'creative state'.

Shomit Mitter states that Stanislavski first 'worked from the body to the mind',<sup>17</sup> but then, 'following the institution of his System' (p. 23), he started to work 'from the mind to the body' (p. 23), and finally in his later career he 'attempted to work the somatic imperative back into his method of approaching roles' (p. 23). Mitter cites several 'advantages' in employing this 'somatic imperative':

First, it rids the actors of self-consciousness both through the manifest inability of the masked body physically to express embarrassment and because the mask transforms the self before the self has the opportunity to take account of that change. (p. 19)

Here again, how to avoid being entangled with self-consciousness seems to be a crucial problem for a performer trying to achieve her 'dramatic action'. By working from body to mind, a performer will be able to overcome that problem without even realising it. The use of the term 'mask' with its practicability will be dealt with later in the chapter. Another advantage of working somatically lies in its tangibility to the performer herself:

Second, whereas feelings can be elusive, the body is palpable and therefore easier to handle. Actors tend to be more comfortable dealing with physical actions than with feelings because actions inspire faith through their actuality. (p. 19)

What is suggested here concerns one way of developing a performer's confidence-building, which she can more quickly and securely establish if she concentrates on her 'physical actions'.



A performer's mind, or 'feelings', comes after those actions. A concrete coordination of a performer's body seems to be able to trigger her mind so that she will 'feel' confident about her performance. It follows that a performer prefers concreteness, and thus a sense of instant recognition of her achievement, to a 'feeling' which does not clearly express itself in the form of a tangible action. When a performer's action is concrete enough, it will not only be 'easier to handle' for her but will also stay within her for a long time to come and will be performed whenever required, which is yet another advantage of a 'somatic imperative':

Third, material cues, being solid, also have the advantage of being more easily fixed to recur. Where the actor's task is not merely to generate feelings but to retain them over extended runs, the body has the advantage of being far more easily disciplined to respond than feelings which are capricious [. . .] (p. 20)

'Recurrence' here implies that a performer having acquired this particular technique can be regarded as having a firm control over her body-work. Mitter sums up 'from the body to the mind' by stating:

Lastly, somatic work has the advantage that it can create experience where there is none to be remembered. (p. 20)

A performer's body comes first, leading her mind to 'feel' according to the body coordination. If Stanislavski's ultimate objective is indeed directed towards mind and not towards body, then the body-to-mind technique may at first look as if it deviates from that objective. In fact, the technique helps a performer smoothly 'feel' her mind under any circumstances.



B. E. Zakhava in Stanislavski Today reiterates the importance of both physical and psychological aspects of the performer:

In life, every muscle participates in every emotion. [. . .] But is it possible to remember and reproduce mechanically on stage the whole infinitely complex system of large and small movements of all the organs which express one emotion or another? Of course not. In order to recreate truthfully this system of movements, it is necessary to grasp the reaction in its whole psychophysical unity, i. e. in the unity of the internal and external, the psychological and the physical, the subjective and the objective. It is necessary to recreate this organically, not mechanically. 18

Zakhava indicates that a performer cannot possibly make a 'mechanical' move. A human performer's physical coordination proves to be too 'complex' for the performer to keep it under control without any mental guidances or mentally-comprehensible reasons behind that particular coordination. The idea of 'from the body to the mind' does not apply here literally. Rather than regarding a performer's body as a concrete and easy-to-control entity, Zakhava focusses on the body as a living creature which is ever-changing, plastic in its actions, and more intense in its details than the owner of the body thinks it is. Zakhava seems to imply that in order to 'recreate' a fine body-work, a performer has no choice but to work mentally since otherwise she would not physically be able to gather together all the relevant parts of the body and make them function properly so that they would fit her purpose. What we note here is that, in the Stanislavskian line of approaching performance, psychology remains the problem to be overcome by a performer. 'Recreating' movements in fact means recreating a certain psychological state.

Meyerhold appears to put a more straightforward and

practical trust in a performer's body than Stanislavski does. Katherine Bliss Eaton explains Meyerhold's stand on 'gestures', from which we can see that Meyerhold sees no reason why the body and the mind should not work in a simple stimulus-response relationship so that one will be made to clarify the other on the spot:

Meyerhold believed artful movement can help the actor go beyond the text of a play [. . .]. Meyerhold pointed out that people often betray their thoughts through movements and gestures, and the thoughts thus revealed may have little or no relationship to what is being said; only through gesture do people disclose their real relationship to each other. Thus two dialogues may be taking place simultaneously: a spoken dialogue and an inner one, the two being quite different, and it is up to the director to show the inner dialogue. 19

For Meyerhold, a performer's body clearly materialises her mind no matter what that same performer does 'simultaneously'. For example, even if she tries to suppress her mind or disguises her mind or denies her mind, the body will often tell the 'truth' to the outside world. The 'inner dialogue' refers to a performer's, or a character's, mind being presented out in the open through her body, in which sense it never remains 'inner'. In Meyerhold's line of thinking, we seem to be allowed to concentrate on our body-work per se, since there cannot possibly be any other way of 'show'-ing the mind. The technique will then concern how a performer effectively controls the 'openness'.

This kind of technique, based on Meyerhold's confidence in the body's substantial ability in performance, starts with a detailed observation of a performer's body. If a performer's body is the primary 'inner' expression which actually shows on



the outside, we have to know more about all the subtle coordination of a human body. A performer should be able to choose an exact coordination for her purpose and to make that coordination in an instant. Meyerhold resorts to a mathematical analysis of the body so that a performer will be able to explore the coordination of her body systematically. The coordination seen this way will also be easier for a performer to study and learn.

The body operates in such a way that, rather than existing side by side with the mind, it leads on the mind, reflects the mind, and is reflected by the mind. Despite their apparent differences in style and technique, Meyerhold's biomechanics and contact improvisation both focus on the performer's body first as a human body following the laws of nature but then as an overt medium of 'expression', which does not so much follow as initiate the 'content'. In Meyerhold on Theatre, the 'stylized theatre' is described:

Since the stylized theatre wants to abolish scenery which is located on the same plane as the actor and the stage properties, to remove the footlights, to subordinate acting to the rhythm of dialogue and plastic movement; since it anticipates the revival of the dance and seeks to induce the active participation of the spectator in the performance, then clearly the stylized theatre is leading to a revival of the Greek classical theatre. 20

Here, the 'stylized' state of the theatre means that a performance has to go back to the point where the primary importance rests on the 'plastic movement' of a performer's body. The 'stylized theatre' possesses the bodily function which in different circumstances would prompt such performances as contact improvisation.



Other people who refer to the technique in general include Copeau when he asserts that '[e]motive expression grows out of correct expression. Not only does technique not exclude sensitivity: it authenticates and liberates it. It upholds and protects it'.<sup>21</sup> Copeau here seems to take the 'correct' technique as an initiator of the enrichment of a performance. Like Meyerhold and contact improvisers, Copeau seems to think that a performer's body leads the performer's mind.

Spolin uses the term 'physicalization':

The theater is not a clinic, nor should it be a place to gather statistics. The artist must draw upon and express a world that is physical but that transcends objects -- more than accurate observation and information, more than the physical object itself, more than the eye can see. We must all find the tools for this expression. 'Physicalization' is such a tool.<sup>22</sup>

A performer's expression has to be physical while more-than-physical at the same time. We will come back to specific and practical exercises suggested by Spolin later.

In the same vein, Schechner points out that 'expression' and 'feeling' cannot be separated in the first place:

Human communications systems are not reducible to the static model of 'sender-channel-receiver', or any variation thereof, that assumes the existence of discrete parts. The human system is an extremely subtle multiplex-feedback one in which the originator of feelings is also affected by the emotion s/he is expressing -- even if these emotions are a lie. [...] the doing of the action of a feeling is enough to arouse the feeling both in the doer and in the receiver. Olivier need not work himself into a jealous rage against the actress playing Desdemona; but neither is he devoid of feelings; performing the actions of Othello will arouse Olivier. The so-called surface of emotion -- the look on the face, the tone of the skin, the tilt of the body, the placement and moves of muscles -- is also the emotion's 'depth'. Cortical and subcortical routines are linked and can be mutually trained.<sup>23</sup>

A 'surface' expression instigates emotion and emotion stimulates a particular movement of the body, in which sense 'surface' is 'depth'. A performer then has a good cause to 'train' her 'surface' expression, being assured that by carrying out the bodily training she is also probing into emotional aspects of her performance.

Strasberg asserts that a technical training would avail to nothing without a performer's 'awareness', which he explains:

An actor often does not do everything he wants to do. His intentions are deflected by habits of which he is unaware most of the time. Instead, he often does things of which he is equally unaware because they are mannerisms -- automatic and unconscious behavior. The essential part of the actor's training tries to make him aware of what he is doing at the time a thing is happening. Otherwise, he doesn't know whether to do it more or to do it less. That is the difference between acting and life. [. . .] This split awareness [. . .] must develop as a kind of sixth sense, and yet it cannot do so at the expense of the actor's belief, his concentration, his involvement in what he is doing. 24

Strasberg reiterates that a performer working on acquiring a technique of 'body to mind' will not be successful in her training unless she knows the impossibility of severing body from mind. A performer somehow monitors what her body is doing through her experience of 'moment', which Strasberg calls 'awareness'.

For all their general preference of a body-to-mind approach over an approach which starts with heavy thinking, none of the practicing performers/directors cited above actually declares that a performer's body is, or should be, the starting point of how we look at performance. The reason does not seem to rest upon the fact that because the function of body and mind is so



intricate a subject in terms of physiology and kinesics, we cannot be certain if everything does start with our body. As we have seen so far, the performers/directors in their own way lay stress on the importance of freeing the body from the mind; and yet they all seem to cling to the 'feeling' in one way or another. Even though a performer has got to start somewhere and a performer's body may be the better place to start than her mind, these performers/directors do not abandon the belief that a performer's body really is moved by what seems to be part of her mind. 'Awareness' nevertheless should not override a body movement since too much 'awareness' would interrupt a performer in the process of going 'from body to mind'.

A technique in approaching performance through a performer's body will enable a performer to be sensitive especially in her 'sixth sense'. In an actual performance, the only time a performer can perform 'seemingly spontaneous[ly]', as Clive Barker describes, is when she lives by this 'sixth sense' successfully:

Study and rehearsal are the preparation for a process, a springboard to action, and not the means of arriving at a fixed result. This is why, in order to produce recreations of seemingly spontaneous patterns of human behaviour, the actor must sink the study and rehearsal material into the automatic reflex activities of the back brain, and to work with an instinctive trust and confidence in the processes of the subconscious body/think. It is the only way he can meet other people in performance. 25

A vital part of the technique required of a performer is enacted when she pushes what she has achieved through studying and rehearsing to the back of her mind. Her 'awareness' eventually



has to land on the 'subconscious' level, with the completion of which a performer for the first time has the chance of actually making her performance seem spontaneous.

Is there a 'pattern' in the relationship between body and mind, a pattern which can be presented so that a performer will be able to learn it? Patricia Relph in discussing Wilhelm Reich and Alexander Lowen, who 'are responsible for clarifying and naming five character types',<sup>26</sup> says of 'pattern':

Of course humans develop in infinite variety; nevertheless, there is much evidence that individuals do exhibit patterns of behavior. There is also considerable evidence that the relationships between emotional experience and somatic behavior are very regular. (p. 30)

Robert L. Benedetti describes 'emotion' and 'information' by dividing 'communication' into a 'nonverbal' kind and a verbal kind, each of which being given a separate role by Benedetti:

Generally speaking, nonverbal communication provides our sense of the intensity and depth of a feeling, while it is best left to words to communicate specific, factual information. [. . .] it is context (plot, the identification of character traits, and the audience's understanding of the situation in which the characters interact) that provides a conceptual understanding of the exact quality of emotion, but it is generally the nonverbal aspects of the performance (muscle tone, the breathing, inflections, and so on) that provide the power and believability of the emotion. Without this nonverbal foundation, our response to a play would be superficial or only intellectual.

The potentiality of nonverbal communication is great, but don't expect it to do a job for which it is not suited. 27

Such a function-specific view of a performer's body and mind may be taken as the recognition of body and mind working in a systematic way: a performer would be able to know, whether intellectually or physically, what her body can do and cannot do. This could help a performer experience her body-mind relations

more efficiently.

Knowing a 'pattern' or seeing some 'regularity' in the body-mind relationship in performance has a tendency to establishing a 'cliché', which Clive Barker describes as what is 'already<sup>28</sup> total, and consciously defined before one employs it'. Instead of 'cliché', a performer can work on 'prototypes' as Barker explains:

A prototype is a structure based upon limited knowledge from which further investigation and development can take place. During our everyday lives, our brain is subconsciously processing information from a wide variety of sources. On the basis of this information we act. It is obvious, therefore, that the more information fed in during the acting process, by study of the text and the situation and from the experiences of rehearsal and performance, the richer will be the prototype produced. (pp. 117-18)

A performer ensnared by 'cliché' will be at a loss in a circumstance which is quite different from the one she has known from experience. The 'total' nature of 'cliché' would not be easily applied to each and every performance occasion. For a performer, no technique can be regarded as being useful unless it actually helps her live the 'moment' of every single performance, however unstable that 'moment' might be. 'Prototypes', on the other hand, is never 'total' as long as a performer is willing to learn. Constituent factors of prototypes will keep modifying themselves, may override one another, and yet should have a strong authority on the performer.

In comparing pantomime and mime, Jean-Louis Barrault asserts that while the gesture for pantomime stays within the framework of content and expression, the gesture for mime does not:

Pantomime was a dumb art; modern mime is a silent art. Ancient pantomime adds to the action proper a gesture language like that of a dumb man [sic]. Modern mime, striving after purity, seeks to forswear this dumb language [sic]. It aims at being action only, and if it superadds anything it is a sort of lyrical song of gesture [. . .]. 29

In Barrault's definition, the objective of pantomime resides in conveying some story or narrative, which inevitably results in a performer's body making a 'gesture language', a gesture signifying some specific meanings to everyone involved in the performance. Barrault defines mime as a kind of 'pure' movement of the body which tries to shed off such agreements on signification between the performer and the audience. This does not mean that mime in Barrault's sense seeks after abstract expressions and representations, as he further explains:

'Unfortunately up till now modern mime has seemed to offer only a limited scope. Either it forks off towards the abstract or the abstruse [. . .]. Or else it harks back to burlesque and links up with ancient pantomime' (pp. 157-58). Instead of simply following the 'language' code, mime for Barrault has to be a work of a coordination between body and mind, which will be regarded as a concrete 'presence' of a performer:

[. . .] miming should not aim at being something simply visual, but a presence, that is to say the embodiment of a dramatic present. The visual aspect of things is only a means and not an end, in the same way as objective miming is a means and not an end. If miming is born from silence it means that it is essentially present. [. . .] The problem is not to be understood, the problem is to be evident, and of course one must not be incomprehensible on the pretence of poetry. 30

From what we have observed about Meyerhold's confidence in a performer's body, his stressing the importance of movement is



fully expected:

Movement is the most powerful means of theatrical expression. The role of movement is more important than that of any other theatrical element. [. . .] For the actor, the theatre is any stage which he can construct for himself -- without the assistance of a builder, wherever and however necessary, and as quickly as his skill will allow. 31

Likewise, Michel Saint-Denis states that '[m]ovement -- gesture -- is an elementary, direct means of expression; our immediate reactions are almost always physical'.<sup>32</sup> Saint-Denis nevertheless moves on to say that he actually considers gesture as a pragmatic wrapping of what should be inside it: 'it is not enough to use a gesture' (p. 148) suggests that gesture after all cannot be but a means, that 'this gesture must be inhabited by a thought; gestures not dressed by thoughts are empty and meaningless' (p. 148). By presenting a distinctive gesture/thought dichotomy, Saint-Denis here seems to assert that physical reactions per se will never obtain a recognised status as a 'performance'. Rather than 'from body to mind', what is suggested here looks more like 'body because of mind'.

Michael Chekhov gives a new meaning to the term 'gesture' by claiming that gesture could equal a performer's psychology:

To increase our own life of the stage means to be able to see everywhere -- in the written words, in the events around us, and in our own psychology -- gestures, gestures, and more gestures, but not states of mind. [. . .] the state of mind which we must understand is one in which the inner movement goes on, and must not be understood as a fixed thing, but as an invisible psychological process going on in a certain definite way. 33

As we will see later in the chapter, 'gesture' in Chekhov's sense is not a figure of speech or is used metaphorically. For

Chekhov, gesture not only realises the 'from body to mind' approach but becomes both the starting point and the goal of a performer's training. 'The state of mind' cannot be 'fixed', by which we assume Chekhov means that the mind is not to be labelled in a nutshell such as 'sad' or 'happy'. The mind will inevitably reveal itself by constantly changing its 'state', that is, by going through a sequence of movements.

Artaud makes it quite clear that a performer innately has a potential for acquiring technique, which enables her to materialise 'universality' through performing:

Compared with the murderer's fury which exhausts itself, that of the tragic actor remains enclosed within a perfect circle. The murderer's fury has accomplished an act, discharges itself, and loses contact with the force that inspired it but can no longer sustain it. That of the actor has taken a form that negates itself to just the degree it frees itself and dissolves into universality. 34

'A perfect circle' and being 'enclosed within' that circle in Artaud's sense mean a self-contained universe of performance, not a pre-determined and rigid enclosure. A self-contained universe can be regarded either as being completely closed or being infinitely open. Performance practice, which we will further look into in the following section, will always 'negate itself' in terms of being part of 'universality'.

## 2.2 Masks

Keith Johnstone uses masks in such a way that a performer will eventually learn to put on and take off her mask whenever required. Johnstone explains that a mask, when successfully worn



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by a performer, simply 'change[s]' that performer. According to Johnstone, the 'difficulty' rather 'lies in stopping the student from making the change "himself"' (p. 167). Wearing a mask prevents a performer from initiating such a change. The use of a mask makes it easier for a performer to actually 'fit' into the role since, instead of trying to 'fit' into something or someone which or who does not yet exist in performance terms, she is now allowed to 'fit' into a 'mask', namely, 'Mak[ing] the face fit the Mask' (p. 166). Johnstone places much confidence in using a mask simply because he believes that a performer, once she puts a mask on, will quickly 'fit', will be more efficient than when she is 'thinking'. Such pragmatic fitting-in tasks contain enough elements needed for performing. 'There's no reason', Johnstone states, 'for the student to start "thinking" when he already "knows" intuitively exactly what sort of creature he is' (p. 167). A performer will be able to 'experience being another creature' (p. 166) by quickly fitting into the mask which she is wearing, since this 'intuitive' action will be the same as saying that she is 'being another creature'.

If a performer is assisted by her mask when she tries the 'from body to mind' way of performing, it is because a mask leaves only a limited number of choices for the performer, making it much easier for her to move quickly and decisively. It does not mean that a performer's variegated range of expressive ability will be straitjacketed by the fact of her wearing masks. Rather, as Susan Valeria Harris Smith argues, a human performer's various feelings such as 'joy, pain, or anger' will find a 'temporary form' (p. 2) within individual masks, a form which a



performer concretises by comfortably wearing each mask, by feeling 'liberate[d]' (p. 2) in it. In the line of 'from body to mind' approach, expressions come out for the outside world to see only when a performer makes some specific bodily movements, and we can say that a mask does half the work for the performer by limiting possibilities and by bringing a performer to a 'temporary reality' (p. 2).

John Harrop also implies that the mask helps a performer to live in the present and not to be bound by some already established factors.<sup>37</sup> When, as Harrop describes, 'The mask reflects, literally and metaphorically, stored aspects of the human condition sculpted to produce responses in the actor' (p. 67), it does not mean that a mask functions in such a way that a performer is led to discover some fixed factors in an already fixed human body and mind. Instead of looking for the completed manual for performance in a mask or trying to mould a future direction with a seemingly fixed mask, a performer brings out her 'present' self through a mask, which is to say that '[the mask] produces response from the deepest wellsprings of the actor's being' (p. 67). Since '[t]he mask does not conceal but reveals' (p. 67), it can be used specifically to prompt a performer to 'discover' (p. 67) what she may not be able to find otherwise. If that discovery is made during an exercise or in the course of a rehearsal (p. 67) and a performer is assured that she has now acquired what she failed to see before, then she will be able to perform fine without a mask from now on. Harrop calls the mask 'a catalyst to process' (p. 67), and it seems that the mask, for

all its 'fixed' appearance, actually benefits a performer as a source of 'imagination' (p. 67) whether used during an exercise or during performance.

Citing the Living Theatre, Robert L. Benedetti discusses what it is to deny a mask in performance. To Benedetti, 'discarding' a mask robs a performer of a chance to pursue some vital elements of performance which are different from everyday life in the first place: 'by discarding the aesthetic mask in favor of an artistic heightening of their own everyday social mask, [the Living Theatre] sacrificed much of the capacity of the process of mask-wearing to move their audiences into extended, heightened or new states of reality'.<sup>38</sup> Benedetti asserts that the Living Theatre drops the mask because they strive for 'self-realization' (p. 73). Their decision in fact works the other way, depriving them of 'the very mechanism which could most help [them] to extend or alter [their] condition' (p. 73). Like Harrop, Benedetti here points to a benefit of wearing a mask, namely, the mask's potential power of illuminating a performer's up-till-now-unrecognised ability to express herself, which she possibly will never have chance to illuminate any other way with as much intensity and clarity. Abandoning a mask may be a performance in itself, but it kills the performance at the same time since 'it connotes the end of change' (p. 73). Benedetti concludes that 'state-of-being acting is [. . .] dramatically and spiritually inferior to acting-as-a-process-of-becoming' (p. 73). From this remark we can infer that mask-wearing not only pushes 'imagination' to the fore but keeps the actual performing alive by making it continuously less-than-perfect, that is, 'becoming'.



As the use of a mask shows, a body-oriented action can produce a performance which is richer and more profound in its expression than we might often expect. The so-called 'intuition' is not necessarily a careless or ambivalent means of performing but it can be an otherwise untestable 'revealing' aspect of a human performer. The question is, how this revelation will be actually practised in a performance circumstance. Mask-wearing can be regarded as being highly useful since, on the one hand, it spares a performer having too many options to move quickly and, on the other hand, its very limitations open the way for the wearer to deepen her imaginative potential. She may thus have an opportunity to explore her ability further in a concrete way.

### 2.3 The Moment of Performance and Sustaining

When a performer's 'instrument', <sup>39</sup> as Strasberg puts it, operates fully and enables the performer to 'make a particular "run" and also many other "runs" so that he can satisfy any demand made by a director or himself' (P. 46), it means that a performer can work both specifically and flexibly. These two may not easily be achieved in a complementary manner to each other: specifics require a performer to distinguish what she is doing from what she is not doing, while flexibility prepares a performer to leave the possibility of another choice open alongside the choice that has been made. In reality, any action by a performer will be a specific, particular gesture whether it happens to be pro-body or pro-mind. Yet at the same time, a performer, being a human, cannot be expected to drop a certain action or line of thinking in an instant totally and



categorically. Hodgson and Richards point to the distinction between a 'surface' flexibility and what our 'feelings' nurture in the 'depth' of ourselves:

If acting is associated with living, and the living is to go on at any particular depth, we cannot accept the switching on and off. Most of our feelings and attitudes build comparatively slowly and the technique the actor aims to acquire should be the sure control of this building. The technique he very often acquires is that he can 'turn on' the surface response associated with feelings, which makes for a completely different response in the audience who, similarly, accept a surface experience. What we must do is to be able to distinguish between the surface and the depth approach. 40

Here the implication is that it is useless for a performer to train only a 'surface' part of her 'response' since it fails to touch what a human performer innately possesses and what she cannot get rid of. In order to delve into the 'depth' of her experience, a performer has to be braced for a considerably drastic method of training. Mask-wearing might be one of such drastic measures. Given that a deep experience will not be susceptible to a whimsical change of its 'surface' counterpart, such training will inevitably be a difficult one for a performer to go through. Two points seem to be at issue: first, a performer has to have an ability to live the moment of performance by unfailingly showing some kind of gesture which is clear enough to the outside world; second, a performer's chosen gesture has to be pending. In other words, making a quick decision for her action cannot be an ultimatum on the part of a performer: it may be sustained in the sense that the decision will be supported or it may be sustained in the sense that the decision will be attacked and be subject to change.

Performance practice can be regarded as a move to tackle those two aspects of decision-making, which ideally renders as deep and flexible a practice as possible.

We find that various performers/instructors/directors give their own account of performance practice with regard to the two points posited above, only that they respectively use their own terms to describe them. Accordingly, we will be advised to interpret the remarks by those people while asking at the same time if they correspond to the above-posited two points.

Strasberg's general attitude towards performing suggests that a performer is expected to concentrate on her performance in such a way that her 'imaginative use of [. . .] various mental, physical, sensory, and emotional resources' <sup>42</sup> in all possible kinds and forms will be used to her advantage. What Strasberg calls for is versatility:

In individual's progress we are concerned with whether or not he is able to deal with any task he sets himself. [. . .] In fact, it is the nature of an acting exercise -- or any exercise -- to be abstract. [. . .] Thus, there is a stage in training -- and also usually in working on a part -- where you do not help the actor by setting him tasks related to final results in the scene. At this moment you do not worry about whether the problem is logically right or wrong in relation to the scene. At this stage you help the actor by setting him tasks that help to encourage in him the kind of response which he has to be capable of giving in any play under any conditions. (p. 147)

To back up his theory of producing a particular 'run', Strasberg stresses the importance of giving a performer a 'task', which by its nature makes it mentally and bodily easier for the performer to start with an actual gesture. The purpose of a task changes according to different stages of rehearsals and moments of



performance, or to different performance styles. When the question is raised as to how exactly a performer trains herself to be more versatile, we may turn to another remark of Strasberg: 'When you see good performers, one of the things that make them good is a certain amount of relaxation' (p. 88). 'Relaxation' corresponds to versatility once it is put in the framework of his approach through 'task'. Being relaxed can be rephrased as not becoming obsessed with only one of the alternatives in performance. Meanwhile, his much-discussed 'affective memory' can be regarded as Strasberg's way of training a performer to show a clearly discernible gesture. A performer, while being relaxed, nevertheless has to be alert in her body and mind so that her gestures will be sharp enough, or 'affective': 'The important thing in using affective memory is to maintain one's concentration, not on the emotion, but on the sensory objects or elements that form part of the memory of the original experience' (p. 110). Despite its apparent connotation, 'memory' is not necessarily restricted to a mental or psychological activity of remembering; it can also be a physical, kinesic activity of retrieving some particular movement or sensation.

Benedetti uses the terms 'relaxation' and 'concentration' in explaining how to sense the 'present' moment:

Relaxation is possible only as a by-product of your focus of concentration. In order to achieve realization of your actual presence on stage, your primary point of awareness must be the present moment, not the past or the future. Relaxation in the sense of being 'ready to act' demands that you immerse yourself in the present instant, because it is only now that you exist. This is more difficult to achieve than would be imagined. We tend to protect ourselves from the unknown of the immediate moment by dwelling imaginatively in the past or the future. 43



Both Strasberg and Benedetti call for an attitude on the part of a performer which consists of utmost alertness towards the 'moment' of performance; a performer has to turn possibilities into realisation, while further possibilities keep coming to her without any interval.

Richard Boleslavsky touches upon 'memory', stressing that it has to be controlled: 'The point is to bring yourself back as you were then, to command your own ego, go where you want to go, and when you are there, to stay where you went'.<sup>44</sup> A performer first of all has to be certain about what she wants to bring out as her 'memory', since 'when you have something to say, the experience comes so much more quickly, a hundred times faster than when you have nothing to say' (p. 39). Still, Boleslavsky's notion of 'memory' seems to put more emphasis on 'memory' as a mental remembering act and its retention; 'memory' of that kind is able to operate 'continu[ously]' and thus help compensate 'our physical strength', which tends to be less sustainable (pp. 20-21). Accordingly, 'concentration' by Boleslavsky means 'the quality which permits us to direct all our spiritual and intellectual forces towards one definite object' (p. 20), which once achieved can be sustained if so required. We might attribute Boleslavsky's approach partly to the fact that he posits the existence of 'something materially imperceptible' which a performer 'concentrate[s] on' (p. 22). According to Boleslavsky, a performer can concentrate even when she cannot perceive the object of concentration 'materially'. This shows how decisively Boleslavsky divides human performers' action and

reaction into physical aspects and mental aspects, which, as far as our present discussion is concerned, poses a question. At the same time, to follow through Boleslavsky's notion, mental concentration is supposed to make a jump into physical expression and back as if a perfect 'memory' will solve all the problems and difficulties regarding the body-mind relationship within a performer.

We find that Grotowski also mentions 'memory':

Make your actions concrete, relating them to a memory. If you are confident that you are doing this, then do not analyse completely what memory is there -- you do it concretely and that is enough. [. . .] there are no impulses or reactions without contact. A few minutes ago we talked of the problems of contact with an imaginary partner. But this imaginary partner must also be fixed in the space of this actual room. If you do not fix your partner in a precise place your reactions will remain within yourself. 45

Unlike Boleslavsky, Grotowski here makes it clear that even an 'imaginary' object must be grasped by a performer in such a way that she will be able to specify that object at least up to a point in relation to the reality she is facing. 'Memory' in this case leans on the kind of performers' activity which comes out kinesically. Grotowski's account, that a contact would not be possible unless a concretisation accompanies it, sounds contrary to Boleslavsky's above remark, although both assertions may in practice bring out similar actions on the part of a performer.

Michael Chekhov's 'method' consists of what he calls 'atmosphere', 'objective', 'radiation', 'preparation',  
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 'sustaining', and 'psychological gesture', which are all body-oriented. When Chekhov describes 'concentration', for example, he does not particularly draw our attention to the mental aspect

of a performer, although we realise that Chekhov in fact does imply the existence of such an aspect and its role in performance: 'concentration makes imagination concrete, and imagination, if it is concrete, cannot be produced without concentration of this kind. [. . .] the images which we are going to act by such kind of concentration and highly developed imagination, [sic] will appear before us while we are working on the part. [. . .] These will come of themselves' (p. 45).

Spolin traces step by step what a human being goes through when improvising:

All have probably seen the roughness and lack of reality in the scene where the actor reads, 'It's cold in here' and then proceeds to shiver; for although the two might in some cases occur simultaneously, inner action generally precedes activity/dialogue:

### 1) Inner Action

Hunger

Physical response:

Salivary glands  
work, etc.

### 2) Activity

Go to refrigerator

### 3) Dialogue

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'What's there to eat?'

As explained above, 'inner action' refers to a performer's physical, or physiological, or biological, or psychosomatic aspect, which distinguishes itself from 'activity': 'inner action' will be regarded as being involuntary, making it in a strict sense a 'reaction' rather than an 'action'. Without such 'inner action', Spolin seems to suggest here, improvisatory



actions performed would not look convincingly 'realistic'. This means that a performer somehow has to bring herself to 'inner action' even when a performance condition does not favour a desired 'inner action' to be felt by her. On the other hand, once the desired 'inner action' happens within the performer, then the following procedures such as a voluntary activity of actually going to the refrigerator will happen smoothly. By experiencing 'inner action' first, a performer explores her potential flexibility in its deepest possible level; this makes her 'surface' actions easier to handle.

In the following remark by Johnstone, an already accomplished skill of driving a car or playing a particular sonata is a prerequisite for a driver's or a musician's mind to 'detach'. Detached mind here means that her mind does not exactly instruct her body what to do in a conscious manner: 'When you are "absorbed" you no longer control the musculature. You can drive for miles, or play a movement from a sonata while your personality pays no attention at all. Nor is your performance necessarily worse'.<sup>48</sup> In a sense, this is an 'ideal' situation for a performer to aim at: it is an ultimate relationship between body and mind. 'Absorbed' in this case does not mean 'obsessed'. A performer in this case finds herself already so confident physically and mentally that she is 'relaxed' and also is purely 'concentrating'. We have to remember, though, that driving or playing a classical piece on an instrument presupposes a format which restricts the range of flexibility allowed.

We can find some examples of action-oriented approaches in

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Carlo Mazzone-Clementi on 'teaching Commedia acting'. Pointing out that 'we must choose between immobility and action' (p. 62), Mazzone-Clementi encourages a performer to 'take chances' (p. 62), which will be rewarded if that performer is relaxed and has 'a clear vision of the goal' because then she will be able to get the 'inspiration' she needs (p. 62). Once again we detect a call for a specific movement or gesture to be initiated from a performer, who should be relaxed but at the same time is expected at least to form a 'vision'. By stating that 'rudimentary exercises must not be done superficially' (p. 62), Mazzone-Clementi stresses the importance of exploring actions in depth, which correlates the remarks made by the people we have seen so far. The assertions by Mazzone-Clementi seem to link up together at a performer's 'kinesthetic level' (p. 62). To Mazzone-Clementi, a performer develops her ability and sees a goal primarily through bodily sensations. Such an approach reveals most directly when a performer tries to break in by taking up the task of 'running', which 'is a primary physical activity [. . .] and drives extraneous thoughts from the mind' (p. 61):

The motion of this act is dominated by the contact of foot and floor -- inhaling, exhaling, turning, wheeling, sweating, as you follow the leader. Do you run badly? You will discover it in motion. Is your body unresponsive? Thinking about it will not help. The kinesthetic response comes only with motion. Kinesthetic response is not a product of brute energy. Paradoxically, the difficult must be easy. We must break down the RUN. Balancing on one foot, then the other. Stretch, reach. Equilibrium: does it desert you when you depend on only that tiny pedestal, your foot? [. . .] (p. 61)

A performer learning Commedia acting eventually starts working with others. Here again, action comes first:

Balance and counterbalance with the partner cannot begin in the brain. We must start, once again, at home: the body. The elementary push-and-pull of the WALK is now explored with the partner. These counterweight exercises with a partner [. . .] train you to move together [. . .] with a common fulcrum. Adjustments must be made for varying sizes and weights. There is never an ideal partner. There is always and only this partner of the moment. (p. 63)

Moving with someone else highlights the circumstantial nature of the 'moment' along with the need for constant 'adjustments', which in the end can only be experienced by way of practical training, or exercises. A partnership develops into a group-work:

Moving from work with a single partner to work with a larger group, the exercises become more complex. We learn to create for one another the 'improviso' situation, to accept easily a new reality (no matter how absurd), to respond in character, honestly, inventively, and spontaneously. All advanced exercises in collective spontaneity take a spiral form basic to commedia. Commedia is juggling. (p. 63)

A performer confident enough in her kinesic 'sensations' when working alone should also become confident and comfortable enough in working with others. She reaches out to her co-performers through sensations. A performer is basically exercising the same approach of moving from body to mind whether alone or with a partner or in a group.

Jane Winearls in explaining the quality of dance movement asserts that '[t]o develop quality in Dance Training, it is necessary to understand and experience the elements from which it springs'.<sup>50</sup> The 'elements' which Winearls introduces are the very elements required of a non-dancer performer as well. 'Three fundamental elements to be considered in movement', Winearls



states, are 'energy', 'design', and 'speed' (p. 79). 'Energy' can be described 'in terms of growing tension which becomes as strong as possible with a maximum of resistance, and of increasing relaxation which becomes as heavy as possible with a minimum of resistance' (p. 79). A dancer who 'understands' the direction and the amount of energy in her body turns out to be not unlike a Commedia actor in the sense that both the dancer and the Commedia actor will be expected to 'know' their bodies' limitations and possibilities. The knowledge in this case is not necessarily in physiological terms but it at least has to be acquired within the range of kinesic senses, which will help the performers move their bodies and picture the consequences of the particular movements they make. 'Design' by Winearls reads: 'The design of body movement is dependent upon the situation of the starting point of movement, and the order in which joints connected with the movement go into action' (p. 80). A performer designs her bodily movements once again by means of the knowledge about her own body. Again, such a performer is not unlike a Commedia actor who understands the mechanism of 'running' inside out through physical senses. Finally, what Winearls calls 'speed' refers to the way the energy is distributed in a performer's body during performance:

The third element to be considered is the gathering and losing of speed. As it flows away from the centre, movement loses speed and gains it when flowing in towards the centre. [. . .] To move at a constant speed indefinitely is very harmful as it destroys the natural rhythm, and a dancer who constantly moves too suddenly or too tardily is subjecting herself to unnecessary strain. (p. 83)

Whether or not such an unnecessary strain had better be avoided

remains to be seen, given that we could think of a performance which is not a 'modern dance' and which deliberately exploits this kind of strain. Still, if a performer understands her bodily rhythm and is thus able to control the 'speed' of her movements, it suggests that she knows how to perform in a relaxed and yet efficient manner. In other words, her body knows how to relax.

Living the 'moment' of a performance and sustaining one's movements precipitate four phases of practical action, namely, 'four phases of mental effort which become visible in small expressive bodily movements' in Laban's The Mastery of Movement.<sup>51</sup> First comes 'the phase of attention' (p. 115), which brings a performer to focus on 'the object of the action and the situation of its execution' (p. 115). Laban points out that attention can be the result of a 'direct concentration' but can also be produced in a 'flexible manner' (p. 115). This is followed by the 'phase of intention', which Laban attributes to a performer's 'muscular tensions produced in small body areas' (p. 115). Laban gives an example:

[A] person's attention is drawn to a book lying on a table. He stands and looks at it directly. His intention of reading it becomes visible in a certain muscular tension in his chest and neck. He decides to pick up the book and his hand moves swiftly towards it, but before he does so he remembers that he has something else to do. No longer having the intention to read the book, he drops his arm. (p. 115)

As is explained above, a performer's intention will not necessarily be followed through completely or be materialised as an overt consequence. This implies that muscular tensions can

function in order to put the action forward or to halt its flow or to change its directions, that is, to 'sustain' an action in both the two meanings of the word which we mentioned earlier.

Next follows the phase of 'decision' (p. 115), which in the above example refers to 'a sudden jerk in the hand' (p. 115). In other circumstances, this phase might develop within a performer 'gradually' (p. 115) instead of suddenly. Finally, there is the phase of 'precision' (p. 115) and Laban seems to mean by this phase a performer's conscious or subconscious supervision over the action which is about to set off:

It is that very brief moment of anticipation of performing the actual deed which, very often, if unfamiliar, is highly controlled by a bound flow effort, or, if the opposite is the case, is unconstrained and charged with free flow. (pp. 115-16)

Like most of the remarks by people we have examined so far, Laban draws our attention to the fundamental question regarding body and mind, though here he does not explicitly mention the workings of a performer's mind. When a performer is obliged to try to 'control' her movements in performance, she can be regarded as being nervous about what she is about to do. We cannot place such nervousness entirely in her body or entirely in her mind, but it certainly can be visible to others in the form of her body acting or reacting in an intense, careful, and somewhat restrained way. When on the other hand a performer feels physically and mentally confident about her performance, she is given the opportunity to plunge into her 'free flow' way of making a move. Here, 'free flow' does not indicate uncontrollability: she finds herself in a purely 'unconstrained



and charged' situation. It means that she is concentrating extremely well both physically and mentally without being conscious of her concentration level.

## 2.4 Exercise

A performer cannot but put her pending choice into a real action at some point, and especially in improvisatory circumstances this often has to be done fairly quickly, possibly instinctively.

This calls for a lot of training, or exercises, on a performer's part, and we will see some of the exercises suggested for improvisation.

According to Michael Chekhov:

[. . .] there are three qualities which the actor must have as continuous abilities. One is the feeling of ease, another the feeling of form, and the third one we may call the feeling of the whole. [. . .] if this ability [feeling of the whole] is developed, the actor will not be lost among the many details, but they will become organic parts of the whole. 52

What Chekhov means by the term 'whole' may require an explanation; he points out that this particular feeling is put to use 'mostly with our partners on the stage, so it requires a very fine mutual understanding and sensitiveness to our partners' (p. 91). If we think of the 'moment' of a performance, and of an improvisatory circumstance, such 'mutual' sharing of 'sensitiveness' can be regarded as the core of the entire practice. Chekhov explicates, although in quite general terms, what it is for a performer to exercise this feeling of the 'whole':

Listen and look at each other, and rely upon this third thing which is this lightly developed sensitivities. This is the thing

which we are actually acting with, not only with our hands and voices, but with something more. This is one of the things which we have to develop. (p. 91)

In Advice to the Players by Robert Lewis, we find an exercise which may be used as a means of exploring sensitivities towards a performer's surroundings and towards her co-performers:

Here's an improvisation that ensures the process of talking and listening. It's a telephone set-up. I am going to place these two chairs about two feet apart with their backs to each other. Each chair is in a room in a separate location by a telephone. I want one person to go to the telephone and call up someone in the class. When that actor hears his or her name, he will go to the other chair and answer the phone. You are each then in different places talking on the telephone. The first actor should have a definite purpose (objective) in mind, preferably something strong, urgent, imaginative. Don't just call your friend and ask her to go to the movies: that isn't likely to lead to a great confrontation. Have a clear intention, stick to it in whatever logical ways you can in order to fulfill it. The person receiving the call, upon hearing the request, demand, favor, or whatever, that is put to him, should immediately adopt his intention and pursue it with all the logic at his command. The dialogue resulting from the two people on the telephone, each controlling his own objective, will constitute the improvisation. 53

Mutual sensitivities sometimes ignite arguments or conflicts, which are perfectly legitimate as long as they remain the products of performers' feelings of the 'whole'. In the exercise above, each of the two performers on the phone is expected to appreciate the other's 'objective' while at the same time she tries to insist on her own 'objective'. As we can see in Lewis' comment following a trial of this exercise, these objectives have to be negotiated tightly and straightforwardly within the given circumstance. Moreover, since it is a performance situation and not an everyday situation, sensitivities include the performers' ability to bring themselves into the given circumstance not



merely in terms of a surface level but with the kind of commitment which involves their deeper levels of action. Lewis' comment reads:

Don't anticipate. You immediately refused to give him the five grand he asked for. Do your fellow students usually call you up in the morning for a loan of \$5,000? I, for one, would, first of all, be flattered. You see, it is not only enough to play your action (which probably would have been 'to refuse the nut'); you must create the logic of the situation, not simply accept it. Maybe you'd try to find out if he's kidding. If he isn't, how the hell did he get into a spot where he needed that much money at once? If it seems genuine, and he's your crazy friend, even though you have to refuse him because you haven't got the money to lend, you might try to think of some suggestion as to where he might go, etc., etc. You then are dealing with a situation based on the truth of your relationship, your characters, the circumstances, and so on, and not playing your intention abstractly. (pp. 85-86)

The 'truth' of the performers' 'relationship' will not be clearly evident to the outside world unless the performers physically and mentally transform themselves and 'live out' the given circumstance. Concrete responses and suggestions from one performer to the other will form an integral part of the 'whole' only when the performers are alerted to the situation of the 'moment'. Without fostering nearly 'genuine' senses towards the incident of that particular telephone-call, the performers cannot easily be alerted enough.

Among the exercises which Johnstone introduces we can pick up the one which explores 'status' between characters/performers. This is another example of training performers' sensitivities towards a given condition. First, 'status' by Johnstone means:

[. . .] every inflection and movement implies a status, and  
[. . .] no action is due to chance, or really 'motiveless'. It was hysterically funny, but at the same time very alarming. All our secret manoeuvrings were exposed. If someone asked a



question we didn't bother to answer it, we concentrated on why it had been asked. No one could make an 'innocuous' remark without everyone instantly grasping what lay behind it. Normally we are 'forbidden' to see status transactions except when there's a conflict. In reality status transactions continue all the time. 54

'Status' seems to be a kind of relationship which involuntarily forms itself whenever one person finds herself in contact with another. A performer's task lies not in pondering over such 'status' but in actually practising 'status': 'Status is a confusing term unless it's understood as something one does' (p. 36). A performer can act out 'status' which is given to her as part of her role. She can also deliberately pretend to have a certain 'status': 'You may be low in social status, but play high, and vice versa. [. . .] Status seems to me to be a useful term, providing the difference between the status you are and the status you play is understood' (p. 36). In a way, 'status' functions like a 'mask', although 'status' seems to emphasise the relative and subjective nature of relationship between performers, which makes it fundamentally group-oriented, more flexible and prone to manipulation than a 'mask'. Johnstone explains how a 'status exercise' will be useful to improvisation:

Once the status becomes automatic, as it is in life, it's possible to improvise complex scenes with no preparation at all. The status exercises are really crutches to support the actor so that instinctual systems can operate. The actor then feels that everything is easy, and he doesn't experience himself as 'acting' any more than he does in life, even though the actual status he's playing may be one very unfamiliar to him. (p. 46)

As an exercise, a performer might reverse the expected status of the role she is playing. When a 'cashier' exerts as high a status as possible or a 'robber' as low a status as possible, it

will be a 'maximum-status-gap exercise', which may look quite 'absurd' in improvisation (p. 72). Once a performer has learned to take such 'absurd' circumstances as 'easy' situations, then we can say that she has acquired a technique to treat sensitivities smoothly.

Performers can also train their sensitivities towards co-performers and the surrounding situations by even more purely focussing on their physical bodies, which is what Chaikin tried in the Open Theatre:

One of his [Chaikin's] first attempts at working somatically, and perhaps the most widely adopted of Chaikin's Open Theater exercises, was sound-and-movement transfers. In contrast to Method techniques, which rely on an actor's emotional engagement with a condition to generate its physical form, sound and movement was an attempt to work from the outside in. One actor would begin a simple, repeatable gesture using both body and voice, not selecting in advance what the action should express, but playing with it until it touched on a clear condition; that actor then approached a second, who tried to copy the forms exactly, thereby being led to their emotional content; the second then altered them and transferred a new sound and movement to a third actor, and so forth. Using kinetic impulses to locate inner states, actors were able to discover emotions that had not been in their experience before. 55

Performers in circumstances such as the one described above are put in a position to depend almost exclusively on their 'somatic' senses. They are devoid of any reliable intellectual frameworks like making a telephone conversation and playing out a certain status, which would compensate or reinforce the performers' somatic sensations. This is an extremely well-refined exercise in that a performer can move or let out a sound only by concentrating on observing what her predecessor does and by replicating it, which requires nothing but sensitivity on a



performer's part. Chaikin seems to believe that a certain movement and sound passed on from one performer to another carries emotional qualities along with it. If a performer successfully copies a movement and a sound which so far have been totally unfamiliar to her, she is now possessing the 'emotion' exerted by the copied movement and sound. Since the exercise is not set up in an intellectual or contextual circumstance in the first place, emotions rendered are likely to reflect a straightforward and fundamental relationship between bodily senses and how mind treats those senses.

Chekhov suggests an exercise which is specifically intended for improvisatory training:

Choose some very simple business, like cleaning a room, finding a lost article, setting the table. Repeat this action at least twenty or thirty times. Each time avoid repetition of any kind. Do each action in a new way with a fresh inner approach. Keep only the general 'business' as a spine for the exercise.

By doing this exercise you will develop your originality and ingenuity, and with them you will gradually awaken the courage of your individual approach to all that you do on the stage. As a result, you will later on be able to improvise on the stage quite freely at all times. This means that you will always find new, individual ways to fulfill old business, remaining within the frame given by the director. You will discover gradually that the real beauty of our art, if based on the activity of the Creative Individuality, is constant improvisation. 56

That a performer commits herself to a simple business over and over in different manners is another way of saying that a performer is living a 'moment' which never repeats itself twice. She has to train to live all the given 'moments' by making them into subtly different 'moments' without deviating from the situation of setting the table. She has to experience the task from every possible angle. This will eventually lead her to



explore deep into each task and to be able to 'sustain' her movements as she pleases.

A more strongly body-oriented exercise suggested by Chekhov interacts with his theory of 'psychological activity':

Choose any naturalistic position, for instance, lean with both hands on the table; sit in a chair with your head resting in your hands [. . .]. Take any of these or similar positions before you realize what their psychological meaning may be. Then, holding the position, try to define what is expressed in it. What Qualities might be hidden behind such a position? What inner activity might have brought you to such a state? This psychological activity with the Qualities you have discovered must be continued inwardly by you. Concentrate completely on the radiation of the discovered activity with qualities, and do it until you feel that your inner strength grows, that the position is absolutely yours and that you can at any minute begin to improvise, starting from this position of yours. Then begin to improvise, continuing the position. (p. 83)

In this exercise, a performer does not even have a 'task' to begin with. Such an overtly from-body-to-mind approach especially serves for a performer who is trying to foster sensitivity towards any possible 'quality' her body may exert. Although 'quality' here might refer to some specific meanings which a particular bodily action signifies, 'quality' in this exercise seems to point more strongly to a kind of energy which each physical gesture builds up and retains.

'Creative Individuality' as Chekhov calls it can be achieved by a performer's conscious and deliberate effort to cast off the convention which tends to straitjacket a performer. There seems to be a premise that a performer is not likely to break away from convention if she simply performs with the hope that her performance will be something unconventional. Breaking the convention needs practice. A performer can go through exercises

which are specifically intended for the training of out-of-the-establishment actions and reactions. Strasberg explains how convention became convention in the first place:

It is difficult to realize how strong and animal-like the adherence to a verbal pattern or convention can be. It is difficult for the actor to perceive how ferociously the cliché holds on to him.

The conventional mold holds out to the actor the attraction of security. After all, a convention becomes a convention because it has proved its effectiveness. It has taken years to develop. It is both acceptable and impressive. It may be phony, but it gives results on the stage. That's why bad acting is always acting. Even if it's bad, it still deals in performance with some of the problems that have to be accomplished in the scene. 57

In order to find a way out of succumbing to the natural instinct for 'security', a performer has to persuade herself not to be afraid of making movements which may look ridiculous or preposterous to other people. Strasberg suggests an exercise:

For example, the first line may be, 'I have to tell you something. I don't know what I have to tell you because I -- ' At that moment there may feed into the line the actor's feeling, 'My wife. You don't like my wife'. This has nothing to do with the lines as such. Nobody has said anything about his wife. Sometimes these banal phrases come out with meanings and connotations that are hair-raising. The exercise is very difficult to do, because the lines the actor says have no meaning in themselves. He can only feed into the lines the meaning of whatever thought is actually transpiring -- no matter what it may be. If he can do so, it means that at this moment he has been able to rid himself of those preconceptions which unconsciously lead the actor to imitate the conventional idea of how a thing should be done. (p. 213)

To reveal her 'stupidity' out in the open may be difficult to do, but this might be one of the most effective exercises for a performer in learning to live a 'moment'. Strasberg also introduces another exercise, which he calls 'one-word improvisation' (p. 105), as another means of training a performer



to be unconventional. The word 'America' is given, and a performer may decide to perform, for example, a drunken Statue of Liberty or an overslept man hurrying to the office (p. 106). Strasberg asserts that 'any statement can be made to mean anything, depending upon the circumstances that surround it and the characterization that is brought to it' (p. 106). As a further variation to the 'one-word improvisation', he takes up Walt Whitman's 'I Sing the Body Electric', which he says could assume a different meaning when uttered by a man when he is having a cold shower on a cold morning (pp. 106-107). The 'one-word improvisation' can be developed into 'three-word improvisation' (p. 107) and so forth, but the principle remains the same, namely, training a performer to free herself of 'preconceptions'.

Performers find it easier said than done to follow their instincts. Most likely they fear their movements would be too shallow to look convincing or too predictable, which suggests that performers often lack a 'plunge' into commitment on the one hand, a sensitive flexibility on the other. The cited exercises will help performers first of all get accustomed to such improvisatory ways of using their physical and mental abilities. Then, performers will be expected to be able to retain the technique they have acquired so that it will actually function 'improvisatorily', in other words, not only when the performers are exercising but whenever and however their instincts and their will command it to function.



## 2.5 Kinesics

A performer who knows how to live the present 'moment' of a performance possesses well-tuned and well-trained sensitivity towards her body. She has the ability to control her body as a constantly-moving entity, as an object which is 'systematically' flexible. Those who aim at refining their kinesic senses will eventually realise that it is a question of how easily they can take full control of their senses. Feldenkrais states: 'People with a fine kinaesthetic sense tend to a low tonic concentration, and are not satisfied until they find the way of doing which involves the smallest amount of exertion; also, the limit to which the unnecessary effort is eliminated, is closer to the ideal minimum'.<sup>58</sup> Here, the mechanism and the working process of kinesics itself claims more importance than the 'result' (p. 109). When pressured to produce results, a performer makes 'effort', which, at a 'higher level', will possibly blind her from 'detect[ing] small differences' (p. 109). Feldenkrais does not regard activities which are 'habitual with repetition' (p. 109) as practices to be avoided; on the contrary, repeated activities sink in and form part of kinesic functions which a performer can control smoothly. As long as she keeps her sensitivity intact so that she can make certain that habitual, repeated actions are 'right' (p. 109), a performer wastes neither energy nor the quality of her performance.

Once such habitual actions are fully under control, a performer can then decide when and how some particular actions should be stressed, brought out of the habitual routine, and

given a new 'meaning'. Daniel Stern comments in an interview:

One of the things that fascinates me is to see what aspect of a behavior an actress or actor will decide to exaggerate, and how they'll exaggerate it. Because that will give a clue to what is the prepotent factor of all the stimuli put together -- exactly how performers build a piece out of sequences of behavior. 59

Exaggeration disrupts the systems of habitual activities with which a performer feels most comfortable, and we have a contrast between habits and exaggerations, each complementing and highlighting the other. If some exaggerations elicit a new 'meaning', it is always in relation to what non-exaggerated actions mean in a habitual situation.

Given this, we realise at the same time that kinesic problems cannot be categorically tucked into neat, binary relationships such as habits versus exaggerations. According to Schechner and Cynthia Mintz, performers may use kinesic actions to show a blunt split-up of 'meaning' and 'channeling', but they may also introduce an unprecedented matching of 'meaning' and 'channeling', or they may even try a matching of 'meaning' and 'meaning'. Schechner and Mintz note that 'meaning' and 'channeling' are not the same as 'content' and 'form':

No one channel can alone convey 'meaning'. Meaning is in fact the confluence of multi-channeled information. When one channel is separated out, say negatively by subtracting speech as in pantomime, or through a change in speed as when Foreman freezes an action or Wilson presents one in extreme slow motion, a dissociation between 'meaning' and 'channeling' occurs. This is somewhat like the old dissociation between 'content' and 'form' but different at the decisive point of communications flow. [. . .] Thus, meanings are combined with meanings because any change in the rate, flow, intensity, or channel used in communicating not only changes the messages but alters the context. 60

Being a complex system of many 'channels', kinesics cannot be discussed under a monolithic concept of 'form' versus 'content' per se. Kinesic variations involve intricate workings of 'channels', which undermines a prospect of stable and consistent relationship between body and mind, although such a relationship may be developed after a performer has gone through a sufficient amount of training and has made kinesic actions habitual. Indeed, performers could instead try to experiment how far the dissociation can go, in what way the dissociation is possible, and how a new 'association' (p. 106) may be formed, which all derive from the fact that a web of kinesic channels produces a different 'context' for each occasion. Schechner and Mintz cite a few performers: '[Dissociations of gesture from meaning] can lead to new associations of meaning that are not consciously controlled by the artist -- as in the Grand Union's work -- or in more controlled new contexts, as in Wilson and Foreman' (p. 106).

Laban, under the theme of 'Analysis of Simple Bodily Actions',<sup>61</sup> suggests that we examine 'bodily actions' of 'a person in everyday life', of 'a person portraying a character in a mime scene', and of 'a dancer performing a particular national or period dance' (p. 53). Laban lists some 'points of view' from which we may examine the actions:

- (a) ways of using the body, whether:
  - upper or lower part of body
  - right or left side of body
  - off or on the floor
  - symmetric or asymmetric
  - simultaneous or successive movements in one or both limbs;
- (b) space, such as:
  - directions and levels of steps and gestures
  - change of front



- extensions of steps and gestures
  - shape of gestures;
- (c) time, such as: quick and slow in gesture and step
  - repetition of a rhythm
  - tempo of a rhythm;
- (d) weight, such as:
  - strong or weak tension
  - placements of accents
  - phrasing arising from stressed and unstressed periods. (pp. 53-54)

These spatial and temporal dimensions of human actions are in fact some of the 'channels', which in this case show externally so that we can 'observe' (p. 53) them for analysis. Even from such simple and general kinesic cues as the ones above, it is clear that 'channels' potentially contain numerous means of making the body move, which is exactly what prompts performers to explore their 'own' systems and variations of kinesics.

A similar presentation of the performer's kinesic movement can be seen in Winearls when she defines 'principles of movement'<sup>62</sup> for 'modern' dancers. Of the four principles introduced by Winearls, 'Principle One' (pp. 18-20) deals with:

1. Tension as outward expansion results in lightness.
2. Tension as inward contraction results in strength.
3. Relaxation as inward deflation results in heaviness.
4. Relaxation as outward release results in softness. (p. 19)

Their examples are:

- for 1. Rising on the toes with fully expanded chest and extended arms as in diving. (p. 18)
- for 2. Rising upwards only in order to come down strongly as in hammering. (p. 18)
- for 3. Sinking to the floor after continued activity. (p. 19)
- for 4. The rising from the keyboard of a pianist's hands after excessive tension. (P. 19)

'Principle Two' (p. 21) is about how a performer might use the

'force of gravity':

When the force of gravity is being overcome by energy, it can be said that Weight is being resisted. If a great deal of energy resistance is used, the resulting movement will be strong. If the minimum amount of energy resistance is offered, the resulting movement will be light. In either case the movements will contain tension as they are offering resistance to weight in some degree.

In making use of Weight, energy can be greatly assisted, and economic movement will balance strength with weight. In giving way to gravity it can be said that Strength is being given assistance. If a great deal of gravity assistance is given the resulting movement will be heavy. If only a little gravity assistance is given, the resulting movement will be soft. In either case the movements will contain relaxation as they are being assisted by gravity in some degree. (p. 21)

Here, the spatial and the temporal aspects of 'tensions' and 'relaxations' crisscross with the gravitational 'assistance' or the body's 'resistance' to gravity. Kinesic actions can at least to 'some degree' be regarded as a question of how a human performer negotiates with gravity. Winearls then explains 'Principle Three' (pp. 22-23), which she breaks up into 'three basic rhythms' (p. 22). 'Rhythm' in this case particularly refers to what Winearls calls 'accent', and the 'initial accent' by Winearls means:

Movements which have their accent at the beginning seek only to leave the present state. Tension is gathered suddenly and immediately released with an explosive action, the rest of the movement being the resulting follow through of the initial action. Whatever the degree of tension, whether it be light or strong, movements with an initial accent are of an impulsive nature. (p. 22)

'Tossing the head' and '[s]natching oneself away from someone's grasp' (p. 22) are among the examples. The 'terminal accent' such as '[t]urning the head sharply to focus upon an object' and '[t]hrusting out the foot to intercept an object' (p. 23) can be



defined as:

Movements in this group have their accent at the end and seek to achieve a definite purpose in attaining a new state. Tension is gathered throughout the movement and comes to a final climax as the purpose is achieved. The rest of the movement is the flow back in order to repeat the action. Whatever the degree of tension, whether it be light or strong, movements with a terminal accent are of a purposeful nature. (p. 23)

Finally, there is the 'transitional accent':

This forms a pendulum like swing which keeps in constant motion between two points. In themselves, pendulum movements are not progressive but can be used to create momentum for movements in the other two categories. Strength and Weight are balanced in such a way that the accent falls upon the transition between the two, i.e., where weight becomes strength, in the middle part of the movement. Whatever the quality of swing, whether strong or light, movements with a transitional accent are of harmonious and regular nature. (p. 23)

This kind of accent appears as we 'swing' our limbs while walking (p. 23). Since 'accent' is a relative term and can only be recognised within a certain length of time, it concerns a performer's action seen as one syntagmatic sequence of several movements. In this sense, 'Principle Three' implies a performer's conscious or subconscious sensitivity towards the entire sequence of actions as a 'whole'. 'Principle Four' has an even wider perspective in that it concerns an overall direction or purpose or goal of a performer's action:

Some actions are free flowing by nature, as in flicking round with a duster. Some are more naturally guided, like ironing. (p. 27)

According to Winearls, '[t]hrowing things about in order to unearth a mislaid object' is an example of 'free flowing'



actions, while '[t]hrowing at a target' is one of 'guided'-flowing actions (p. 27). A performer is supposed to master all these 'principle' kinesic actions not only separately but also in various different arrangements.

As we have seen before, a performer's sensitivity must be directed towards her surroundings, including her co-performers. Schechner and Mintz make the point of seeking kinesic analyses in the field of 'group' performances:

The performing group is particularly close-knit; rehearsals themselves may be looked at as a means of generating harmony among a group of people who normally might each go their own way. The traditional advantage of 'ensemble', performing has been this 'harmony'. But what is harmony, insofar as it applies to performance? We believe that it may be kinesic congruence, what [A. E.] Schefflen calls 'reciprocals'. All human interaction [. . .] shows a high degree of intra-group reciprocation of movement. It is our contention that performing groups show much more than the average; that, in fact, it is the high density of reciprocal gesturing, posturing, and grouping that is the basis for what is 'felt' as an 'ensemble'. If this thesis is true, and it can be tested, then new exercises in reciprocal gesturing, posturing and grouping can be developed to directly foster ensemble performing. 63

What we plainly call 'feelings' may be understood as being prompted by active kinesics, though, as hinted above, this by no means is the same as saying that a performer's 'feelings' are kinesic actions per se. In performance practice, the question of body and mind in many cases compels a performer to start with body rather than with mind. It does not necessarily mean that body and mind are separable.

### 3 Contexts, Text, Form, and Process

As long as a person is called a 'performer', her decision-makings and actions rely on a certain framework which at least roughly determines the direction and the nature of the performance piece. We will examine in this chapter some possible frameworks and their capacity for improvisation.

#### 3.1 Improvisation in Three Contexts

Anthony Frost and Ralph Yarrow set improvisation in 'three major contexts':<sup>1</sup>

[Improvisation] feeds firstly into what we might call traditional training, as a preparation for performance and a way of tuning up the performers. We can place this in the (Stanislavskian) tradition of 'character' preparation, or to put it another way, as a method of schooling the actor to project the 'reality' of the character [. . .].

The second tradition (or perhaps anti-tradition) rests on a more radical acknowledgement of the fragmentation of nineteenth-century notions of a consistent personality. The comic and the satiric vein, often allied to improvisation, challenges assumptions about stable social personality and 'bourgeois' respectability; taken to extremes, it undercuts political, religious and philosophical myths about the coherence of individual identity and its consonance within a system of stratified order and significance. The work of Jarry, Artaud and Beckett, for instance, extends and foregrounds this destabilisation; it also requires a more radically physical and improvisatory approach to acting, and it is not surprising that alongside this eventually scripted and accepted form of theatre, work on and with improvisation should have continued to develop almost as a form in and for itself. [. . .]

The more radical modes of improvisation both accept the consequences of the disintegration of the existential self and attempt to use them positively. Grotowski's actors learn to 'disarm', to arrive at a condition without the protective masks of the familiar or the comfortable escapes of dramatic cliché. The work focuses not on the reality of the character but on that of the performer; where it emerges as public theatre, it is the inventiveness and authenticity of the performers in their relationship with the spectators which is foregrounded, as opposed to the presentation of a narrative. Here improvisation and performance are seen as part of a developmental process which can thus extend beyond theatre into, for example, psychotherapy or education. (pp. 14-15)



If, as Robert L. Benedetti states, Stanislavski's 'vision was of the performance not as a reflection of reality, but as a reality into itself',<sup>2</sup> his vision in training a performer to 'project' the character would also bring the performer 'towards being' (p. 46) rather than towards 'seeming' (p. 46). To make the 'being' happen, the Stanislavskian performer may be forced to go through an overwhelmingly repetitive trial of improvisation:

Kostya's sea journey, put forward by Stanislavski as an example of the actor's work process at its most fruitful, occurs at the nth repetition of an improvisatory exercise which Kostya and the other student-actors are heartily sick of. They have been over and over the material, can't get into it, etc. And yet it is precisely by going over it (one more time) that the actor does get into it (at last). Which is to say: Rehearsal [sic], of which Kostya's experience is here offered as the type, has, like reading, the form of a penetration-by-scanning. Running over and over the lines, one at length penetrates to the core of the material. 3

Assuming that a 'character' can be paralleled with 'the core of the material', we accordingly take improvisatory exercises such as the ones mentioned above as having one specific purpose for Stanislavski and the Stanislavskian performers: these performers first and foremost have a goal to reach for, which is to 'penetrate' to 'the core of the material', to be. Improvisatory exercises are the means of achieving 'being' while at the same time they are part of the whole 'initiation' process towards 'being'. Ideally, then, each improvisatory exercise will function organically so that the performer literally 'builds up' the character. The performer uncovers every possible element of her character through as many improvisatory sessions as she needs. Only when it is agreed upon that the 'character' has been



reached is the performer's 'preparation' considered to be done. In the Stanislavskian sense, the procedure involving improvisation therefore is logocentric: a 'character' can be complex or not so complex but he or she always has to be completely 'projected', otherwise the performer playing the role of that character is not truly 'being' the character. The whole procedure of exercises including improvisation loses its meaning without a thorough manipulation of a character by the performer.

Stanislavski's view towards performers playing a role may then succinctly be put as follows:

In Stanislavsky the actor plays a role and the result, ideally, is illusion. In Brecht, the actor plays a role and the intended effect is alienation. In Grotowski, the actor plays a role in order more clearly to be himself. 4

'Illusion', if achieved, indicates that the performer 'being' the character is satisfactorily noted as such by the viewer as well as by the performer herself. The ultimate performer, for Stanislavski, is in fact a 'character'. Such a strong pro-character approach seems to be based on the premise that a performer can be a character after going through a sufficient amount of preparation including improvisation. This in turn suggests that the performer and the viewer are all put in a position to judge if the performer's 'being' a character is 'true' or not. On what basis they evaluate the performer's 'being'-ness is another question; our present concern centres around the fact that improvisatory exercises were in fact regarded as being useful for the Stanislavskian performers in their attempt to be a character.

We have to remember that the approach which Stanislavski took was at least to some extent unavoidable, especially when he worked on Chekhov's plays:

For all the affinity he professed to feel for them, Stanislavski did not find Chekhov's scripts easy to read. [. . .] And, indeed, the first time through, The Sea Gull struck him as 'monotonous' and insufficiently 'scenic'. 'Are you sure,' he asked Nemirovich-Danchenko, 'it can be performed at all?' This last comment reveals Stanislavski, as reader of Chekhov, grappling with what we have seen to be the characteristic dilemma of readers in Chekhov: inability to imagine taking action on the basis of what one has read. [. . .] Unable to read in and act from the text, one reads into the text something which, as already one's own, it is possible to act upon. 5

Improvisatory exercises were supposed to make up for what was missing in Chekhov's scripts. 'In one type of theatre (say, the Chekhovian)', state Frost and Yarrow, 'the implication is that characters encounter one another. In another (say, in commedia)<sup>6</sup> the actors meet [. . .]'. The fact remains that we can also try the Stanislavskian approach in non-Chekhovian plays; Chekhov's plays on their part can be performed from many approaches other than Stanislavski's. For example, we can easily imagine a situation such as the one witnessed by Jim Hiley in a rehearsal with John Dexter as the director:

Many younger -- and not so young -- performers like to ask hard questions about their characters' motivation and backgrounds. This is a welcome antidote to the waffly, generalised work that goes on in so many pockets of our theatre. A different director on Galileo might have gone in for that sort of talk, and perhaps used improvisation to explore the lives of the characters away from the text; this could have helped fill out the smaller performances. Dexter would contend that such delving was not his responsibility, though it is doubtful whether it can ever be pursued effectively in isolation from the ensemble.

Interestingly, Simon Callow enjoyed Dexter's approach, despite a strong Stanislavskian background. Dexter was a trainer, he said, not a teacher; and a lot of actors' talk about improvisation was 'indulgence'. 7



In this case, improvisation towards character building was not exercised because the director did not 'delve' into the discussion concerning the 'lives' of the characters in the first place.

What Frost and Yarrow term as the 'second tradition', or the 'anti-tradition', parts itself from the first tradition when the performer's role as a character is recognised as acutely as the character per se:

The improvisation is not about the character's inner life, but about the actor's. It awakens responses in the performer which are primal, and personal. Afterwards, they can be analysed and adapted and assimilated into the actor's conception of the role. As they are happening, though, they force the actor to respond directly and imaginatively to the situation. 8

Without such a 'personal' approach to the character, a performer, in Jerome Rockwood's words, 'will have no basis for the creation of a character for which, after all, he will have to borrow from his own store of emotions and experiences'.<sup>9</sup> Improvisatory exercises in the Stanislavskian sense would have been impossible if any 'personal' approaches on the part of the performer had been denied, but what mattered to the Stanislavskian performer was a mental and physical conviction that he or she was becoming a character. As soon as that conviction starts losing the absolute authority, the very presence of the performer will inevitably be foregrounded. The performer on the brink of the 'anti-tradition' finds herself in a subtly ambivalent position of 'being':

The presence is not only the actor's 'scenic nature', something



that precedes expressivity and is independent of it. It is above all the dialectic complement of expressivity, the other pole with which expressivity interacts, giving shape to the acting [. . .] Acting is not expressivity alone but the result of a dialectic between expressivity and presence, between the expressive and the pre-expressive level. 10

The 'pre-expressive level' of a performer seems to present problems in the performer's preparing process while, as Jacques Copeau explains, the solution to those problems can also be found in the same pre-expressivity:

The actor is no longer himself. And he is not yet 'other'. The more he prepares for the role, the further he gets from what he was doing on the first day. He has had to give up the freshness, the naturalness, the nuances and all the pleasure that he got from his instant interpretation, to accomplish the difficult, thankless, painstaking work of turning what is literally and psychologically true into what is theatrically true. He has had to set up, to master and assimilate all the processes of metamorphosis which simultaneously distance him from his role and lead him into it. It will be only when he has completed this study of himself in relation to a given character, articulated all of his capabilities, exerted all his being in the effort to serve the ideas he has conceived and the feelings for which he is paving the way within his body, his nerves, his mind, into the very depths of his heart, only then will he be able to get a new grip on himself, now transformed, and try to give his all. 11

Despite advocating the performer's every possible effort from every possible angle to 'transform', which exerts hardly any difference from what 'Kostya' experiences in his improvisatory exercises, what Copeau clarifies here is a kind of detachment on the part of the performer towards his or her character. Such detachment prompts a performer's emotional stepback, which in turn enables her to start concentrating more on somatic possibilities. A conversion of a 'psychological' truth into a 'theatrical' truth is expected through the performer's exploration of herself. More importantly, however, this

seemingly detached approach towards a character actually turns out to be what 'leads [the performer] into [his or her] role'. This seems to imply that detachment will open the way to discovering a dimension of a character which otherwise would not have been touched upon. If a performer concentrates on getting a 'grip' of herself, which in itself does not necessarily mean that she consciously 'expresses' herself, she will be more 'into' the character.

At this point, improvisatory exercises take on a different and more nebulous meaning because they no longer function exclusively as a means of making a performer a character nor are they strictly part of the process for the performer to become a character. Improvisation instead is now loaded with a power not only to deepen the performer's expressivity but to change the structure of the theatre as well. What Copeau describes as 'a new improvised comedy'<sup>12</sup> may be introduced as an example:

Choose from among the company, the six or eight actors most suited for this project, the most alert, the most confident and the most compatible with one another, who will henceforth concentrate almost exclusively on improvisation. [. . .] Each one of them takes on one of the characters of the new comedy. He makes it his property. He nourishes it, fattens it up from his own substance, identifies his personality with it, thinks about it continually, lives with it, giving it not only his own constitution, external abilities and physical peculiarities, but his ways of feeling and thinking, his moods, observation and experience, sharing his reading, in short developing and changing along with it. [. . .] At first I play the role of the poet in front of these jesters. This new thing springs from me. I know its origin and its early development. In order for them to retain all their freshness, I forbid research by the actors. [. . .] We do exercises repeatedly, but we never take the same scenario more than four or five times. We exercise on any pretext, while out walking, during meal-times, preparing our roles for any eventuality. We become our role, and we confront it with those of our comrades, thus beginning the formation of a collaborative work. Soon, the characters develop entirely without me; they escape from me completely. Scenarios are



created one after the other from within themselves. My only role in relation to them is that of critic. The comedy is ripe; it appears on stage. If it succeeds it will outshine all other genres, and soon there will be a new development when it starts to enrich itself from the outside, by the contributions of the public, who will finish the modelling of the characters we present, and by the contributions of the poets who will borrow their characters from the new comedy to develop or change them according to their own imagination. (pp. 153-55)

At first, the performers described above seem to improvise within the framework of a-performer-given-a-role. As they devote their whole selves to materialise their respective characters, the performers begin to shift the framework with which they started. In Copeau's words, the result of such improvisatory works would be a new 'genre' (p. 155). A 'genre' in these circumstances may not constitute any substantial shape which will eventually leave a mark in the theatrical history; rather, 'genre' here implies 'the freedom of creative imagination, of dramatic fantasy' (p. 155), something that goes beyond a straightforward character-performer relationship and enters into new entity.

The third stage of improvisation according to Frost and Yarrow is in the realm of theatre on the verge of going 'beyond theatre'. Grotowski's actors, as Frost and Yarrow point out, concentrate on being performers in such a way that the very idea of 'character' is put into question or even denied. Here, the purpose of Grotowski's and his actors' experiment is quite clear. When 'beyond' refers to the use of improvisation in a therapy session or in primary schools to teach some basic social rules to children, we can also measure the extent and the purpose of going 'beyond' in a relatively decisive manner, although in quite a different sense compared to the way we see Grotowski and his



actors. Apart from those cases, this third stage draws on a wide range of unclear theatrical framework coupled with uncertainty in how or when a performer goes 'beyond'. While theatre for therapy or theatre in education is outside our discussion in this thesis, more subtle and unclear 'styles' of theatre/beyond-theatre are essential elements in our discussion because such opacity is precisely that which defines 'performance improvisation' further. Opacity shows in various ways, one of which we find in the following passage from Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts. The passage describes the world presented in a village pageant and the 'real' world of the villagers overlapping each other as the village performers and the village audience 'mingle' at the end of the pageant, creating illusion-cum-reality:

Was that the end? The actors were reluctant to go. They lingered; they mingled. There was Budge the policeman talking to old Queen Bess. And the Age of Reason hobnobbed with the foreparts of the donkey. And Mrs. Hardcastle patted out the folds of her crinoline. And little England, still a child, sucked a peppermint drop out of a bag. Each still acted the unacted part conferred on them by their clothes. 13

Can we say that the villagers are 'improvising' and that such an illusion-cum-reality is 'performance'? We will look into the idea and the concept of 'performance' and 'performance improvisation' more closely in chapter 4.

### 3.2 Improvisation and Text

We can think of texts which do not necessarily have a format suitable for literary criticism. 'The participants in happenings and performance pieces', describes David Cole, 'work from

instruction sheets or scenarios. And even when no script, however rudimentary, is in evidence, reading -- displaced from scripts to other kinds of texts -- quite possibly still forms the basis of the actor's work. In such cases the script-surrogate may be a manifesto or theoretical document [. . .]<sup>14</sup>'. Here, the question of 'loyalty' to the text hardly comes up as an issue simply because 'texts' no longer are play-texts, or play-scripts. Texts exist in different shapes bearing different functions. They may still present a format seemingly unchanged from that of a traditional play-script; on the other hand, they may be rough memos intended for a general instruction to the performer; or, they may look like a map, an illustration, or a graph. Some texts would clarify as many details as possible, while some would only indicate principles. The author of the text might be important, while in some cases the identification of the author would not matter very much. Some texts may retain their content without any modification or re-writing, while some may go through such modifications from performance to performance. Some texts start from a scratch and the participants will have to develop them during rehearsals and in performance. An improvisatory performance appearing through these textual frameworks will inevitably be quite idiosyncratic, that is, highly dependent on individual cases.

Norma Jean Deak writes, directs, and performs. Her 'text' and improvisatory possibilities in it are described by Deak herself as follows:

Because I considered myself primarily a performer rather than a writer or director, my first performance began with an idea for a



particular character. After making the costume and collecting a few props, I went into the space dressed as the character and improvised different actions. I had a vague idea of possible situations beforehand, but I did not write a scenario or make any notes in advance. Although I wrote a small amount of text as I went along, the final performance was based primarily on the improvisations I did during rehearsals. The performance was a vehicle for the character and a vehicle for me as the performer.

With my second performance my way of working changed. I wrote a scenario based on a short text that I had written. The scenario included indications for staging, dialogs and narrative sections. Before it was completed, I started to work on staging and wrote additional text as needed. With each new performance the text became more important and writing took up more of my preparation time. For my last few performances I have written complete scripts before beginning to work on staging. I now think of myself as a writer/performer. 15

Her 'vague idea of possible situations' and her 'small amount of text' apparently help Deak improvise. She seems to be able to 'create' with such a rudimentary text. More precisely, improvisation actually develops the text for her, the text which eventually identifies with her physical performance. In her 'second performance', the initial text is not a rough memo but more like a play-script, although Deak can still modify it as she goes through preparations. Any improvisatory actions in her 'second performance' have a solid 'canon' to rely on.

In the case of Atelier Théâtre et Musique's performance, improvisatory elements are stipulated like a cue as part of the meticulously arranged 'text' of their own:

Work on San Paroles [sic] (Without Words) began in 1978 with acute observation of Bagnolet residents at a cafe -- the gestures that they made, facial expressions, their nonverbal sounds, and the words they frequently spoke. Certain of these gestures, sounds, and words were chosen and structured according to one of the 'systems' that are part of the 'grammar' developed by [Georges] Aperghis and the group. These fragments of cafe behavior became the 'words', and several of these 'words' comprise a 'sentence'. The 'words' and 'sentences' are scored according to a 'system'. The score for Sans Paroles, and a later version set in a self-service restaurant called Métode pratique

pour se perdre [sic] (Practical Method for Losing One's Way), is performed as a round (en canon). Each element in the score below is precisely determined in advance except the 'Free Gestures' which are left entirely to the improvisation of the actors.

'Gesture 1', for example, is exactly the same gesture each time it appears in the score. Each line of the score is a 'sentence'.

- A) Gesture 1
- B) Gesture 1/Sound 1
- C) Gesture 1/Sound 1/Phrase 1
- D) Gesture 1/Sound 1/Free Gesture/Gesture 2
- E) Gesture 1/Sound 1/Phrase 1/Gesture 2/Sound 2 [. . .] 16

'Free gesture' is 'free' in the sense that nothing is planned for the performers during this particular moment. At the same time, it is possible to look at 'free gesture' as a deliberate 'plan': for the duration of the time allocated for 'free gesture', the performers have to perform according to their own directions. In fact, these supposedly 'free' gestures are bound by the text since they cannot weaken or divert the whole structure of the performance. 'Free gesture' has to help maintain the flow of the whole sequence of the performance. It is highly unlikely that during 'free gesture' a performer suddenly starts a fight with another performer in the cafe unless the following part of the score will smoothly co-ordinate this. 'Free gesture' in Sans Paroles may be regarded as a more 'serious' version of classic improvisation exercises such as the ones described by Viola Spolin among others.

The published version of Abigail's Party states that Mike Leigh is the one who 'devised' the play; there also is a note for the reader, which says, 'Abigail's Party was evolved from scratch entirely by rehearsal through improvisation'.<sup>17</sup> The published script in fact reveals nothing about improvisation to the reader. As far as its reader is concerned, Abigail's Party will stand



side by side with, for example, Alan Ayckbourn's Absurd Person Singular, or basically any other play-script we usually obtain in a published version. To what extent other plays go through a textual development by way of improvisatory trials without mentioning it in the published text is another matter. The fact remains that were it not for the above-mentioned note, a reader would almost certainly 'read' Abigail's Party in the same way as she reads Ayckbourn unless she has the prior knowledge of who Mike Leigh is or in what kind of performance Leigh and his actors are interested. Attaching such a note for the benefit of the reader in itself draws her attention to the making process of the play, while at the same time the reader still has no way of knowing how exactly the play was improvised; being notified that a play was devised through improvisation seems to have little effect on our actual 'reading' of the text as a published, printed matter.

Abigail's Party in the form of a published script is a text at the time of, and after, the performance rather than a text growing with the procedure of devising the play. A text in this form may be called a post-performance publication. At this stage, a text functions more like a record or anecdote of the actual performance in two senses: first, if improvisatory elements during rehearsals result in some kind of fixed elements by the end of the rehearsals and by the time of performance, an anecdote tends to provide us with only the outcome of a process; on the other hand, especially with the kind of performance which heavily relies upon the performer's improvisatory actions during the actual performance, an anecdote we obtain may literally be a

record of a once-only performance. The latter case can be enacted either purposefully, that is, for the sake of recording a performance, or simply as a natural result of a creating procedure chosen by individual performers, an example of which we see in some forms of Happenings:

The wonderful thing about new free theater is that you cannot have a playbill. Spontaneous happenings are like this also -- you cannot say ahead of time who will do what or what will take place. One must have something like an afterbill which is written up afterwards. This has long been a favorite thought of mine. Then the afterbill would be mailed to any person who had been in or at the performance and wanted a record of what had happened. 18

In a sense, 'recording' a performance and making it public so that it will be available for a permanent reference goes against the principles of improvisation: once made into a 'text' of whichever form, an improvisatory element may be transformed into a proto-text as Roselee Goldberg points out when discussing one of John Cage's performance: '[John Cage's] Variations V, given in July 1965 at the Philharmonic Hall in New York, was a collaborative work with Cunningham, Barbara Lloyd, David Tudor and Gordon Mumma; its script was written after the performance by chance methods, for possible repeats'.<sup>19</sup> An 'afterbill' therefore will make an otherwise once-only performance a repeatable 'text'. Meanwhile, a recorded 'chance' performance might become a practical source of yet another phase of development, possibly an improvisatory one, in the future. A 'text' can be a stable and fairly reliable anecdote but it can also open itself for a further development during performance. Richard Schechner explains: 'On a larger scale, the whole



workshop-rehearsal phase of performance needs protection and isolation, a well-defined safety net, while the finished performance can move from place to place on tour, overcome many particular distractions heaped on it by audience, and in general "take care of itself".<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that what we call 'text' varies in its form, meaning, and use for individual authors, directors, performers, and the reader/audience:

The fact is, text just won't sit still under your eyes. The nature of text is to demand an answer and, as you respond, to demand another. Text is one part in a conversation. Like the mime who implies the kite by its effect on isolated body parts, text implies its answer by its own flight from center. Text means so much, in the performance it keeps demanding of you, that its meaning cannot be frozen, but continues to spawn itself in what Artaud, watching the precise manipulations of the Balinese dance, called 'an infinite perspective of conflicts'. If it doesn't do this, it is not, for you, a text. 21

Accordingly, improvisatory elements vary. While 'improvisation' may bear different meanings for each person involved in a particular 'text', the fact remains that it is always a text's 'demanding' nature which prompts the participants of a performance into action, including improvisation. Without having a text to which 'you' can 'respond' in a profoundly confrontational way, 'you' have little chance of eliciting the kind of improvisation which is not 'shallow'.

### 3.3 Form and Process

Not everyone can agree on when and how improvisation happens in a performance. Even though improvisation always occurs in the 'moment' which we share together, we do not necessarily

experience the 'moment' in the same way. There was a kind of agreement among the performers and the audience in the *commedia dell'arte*, if not a perfectly identical understanding of performance, then at least a practical performative skill on the part of the performers and an eye to appreciate that skill on the part of the audience. Such an agreement established improvisation in the *commedia dell'arte* as an object of evaluation or criticism. To live in an improvisatory 'moment' while knowing very well that it is improvisation, both the performers and the audience need to recognise spontaneously a 'form' in the performance. Susanne K. Langer explains 'form' with regard to 'human mentality' as follows:

The comprehension of form itself, through its exemplification in formed perceptions or 'intuitions', is spontaneous and natural abstraction; but the recognition of a metaphorical value of some intuitions, which springs from the perception of their forms, is spontaneous and natural interpretation. Both abstraction and interpretation are intuitive, and may deal with non-discursive forms. They lie at the base of all human mentality, and are the roots from which both language and art take rise. 22

We can assume that the *Commedia* performers and audience were given enough information and 'education', through their experience of performing and observing, to acquire the ability of exercising what Langer calls abstraction and interpretation of a form. In each *Commedia* performance, they could detect and evaluate improvisation on the basis of the form they recognised.

According to Langer, a 'constant illusion of an imminent future, this vivid appearance of a growing situation before anything startling has occurred, is "form in suspense"' (p. 310), which we may assume will exert confidence both in the performers



and the audience, helping them appreciate improvisation. The question is, what does improvisation fall into when no agreement can be made among the participants as to the 'form' of a performance? In other words, if what Langer terms 'form in suspense' is unlikely to be sensed by the audience and the performers in a similar way, we may wonder how participants can reach the point when improvisatory actions may be recognised. Once a performance starts rejecting the inevitability of such suspended 'form', it will be more problematic to talk about improvisation.

Performers and the audience take fundamentally different approaches to 'form', simply because the performers have worked together in the creating process of their performance whereas the audience, even when they participate in a non-rehearsed performance, are usually deprived of the general idea as to where the performance is headed or what its 'purpose' is.

From a performer's point of view, especially when he or she embarks on a performance which does not have a pre-existing 'text' such as a play-script, a 'form' of whatever kind may be heuristically evolved and developed in the process of making a performance; this is a separate matter from the fact that the performer is, or is not, aware of being in the middle of actually creating a form. Desmond O'Donovan, by using the word 'style', says, 'A style is not something one can consciously impose or really worry about. Style comes from one's sense of knowing what one's doing'.<sup>23</sup> The importance of 'process' can in some cases equal or even overwhelm that of the performance itself as a

'work':

The process of its making and its reception always exceeds the work. For Brecht -- who stops at the very threshold of postmodernism -- the making and the process are still predicated on what is made, on the meaning to be produced; after Brecht, in the work of Beckett, for example, making and enunciation form a signifier which cannot be reduced to a signified. 24

Schechner's environmental theatre also emphasises the importance of process:

The task of environmental theater is to make process part of each performance. For the performer most of his daily work is process. If he knows where he's going and how he's going to get there, he cannot invent or discover in response to known and unknown obstacles. A performer deep in process is satisfied with any point in his work provided he is in touch with that point. The ultimate of the work is identical to its immediacy: to be alive to the here and now, to express oneself here and now. What an immense risk that is! Those who love products value things and make things of all living beings. Those who love process value living and make living beings of all things. 25

Schechner elsewhere defines process as 'rough and unexpected turbulences, troubled interruptions [. . .] not stylistic, but<sup>26</sup> the genuine meeting between performer and problem'.

Improvisation, being an embodiment of a temporal aspect in the preparation and the presentation of a performance, deeply involves both 'form' and 'process'; this also makes improvisation less easy to detect or to recognise.

### 3.4 Examples

Reading Schechner's words in Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre, which was published in 1969, we are able to assume that what happened to the theatre world during the years between the 1930s and the 1960s turned what had been thought as improvisation upside-down, making it almost impossible for us to pin down



'improvisation' confidently:

[T]he pattern of theatre experience offered by the Group [the Group Theatre] in the thirties and rigidly maintained by former Group members and their students in the forties and fifties is yielding to a more diverse set of experiences. It becomes less and less easy to set up dichotomies such as Broadway versus off-Broadway, regional versus New York, commodity versus art, script versus improvisation, art versus politics, or even theatre versus non-theatre. 27

We will here take a look at some performances that appeared mainly towards the latter half of this century. Problems regarding improvisation against context, text, form, and process were most vulnerably and subtly handled by those performances.

Despite their departure from a character-performer unification, the kind of performances that we will review in the following actually take up the Stanislavskian line in one crucial point, as Robert Benedetti asserts:

[. . .] Stanislavski's vision, his central impulse if not his form, is still very much alive in our theatre, not only in our traditional theatre but also in the work of the avant-garde such as Jerzy Grotowski, Julian Beck, Joseph Chaikin, Richard Schechner and others of equally disparate persuasions. This central vision was of the performance not as a reflection of reality, but as a reality into itself. It is this impulse away from seeming and toward being that we must gratefully credit to Stanislavski. 28

If, for Stanislavski, a 'vision' towards being was intended for the transformation of a performer into a character and not for the presentation of a performer as a performer, his 'vision' was at least putting a performer in the position of 'living' the moment on stage, not merely representing some particular personality. In the latter half of the twentieth century, 'being' as 'living' the moment seems to take on an even more

vital factor in performance, which is to say that 'being' overlaps a performance itself rather than overlapping a performer's 'vision' or a director's 'vision'. Improvisatory elements can be attributed in the following examples to each performer's way of 'being', hence the difficulty of pinning down exactly when and where improvisation starts.

Schechner's environmental theatre is 'neither mimetic nor psychodramatic' and has the 'logic' not of 'the story but the logic of story-telling'<sup>29</sup> according to Schechner's own account. He continues:

Two groups of people agree to meet at a certain time and place. One group comes to witness a story, the other to tell a story. The story is of importance to both groups. For most of the performance time the agenda of story-telling is adhered to. But at any time the story can be set aside or advanced (told) in a different way. For most of the time the group witnessing the story plays the bass line of the performance while the story-telling group plays the melody line. But these roles may be shared or reversed. The sharing and reversing is possible because of an assumption everyone makes: Anything that happens in the theater during the performance time is part of the performance. (pp. 83-84)

Meanwhile, Schechner describes the 'position' of 'experimental theatre' as that which 'stands between the "once only" of paintings and Happenings and the "performing repertory" of ballet or Asian theatre'.<sup>30</sup> Being 'experimental' by Schechner means that we are able to 'add to spheres of experience rather than knowledge' (p. 17). Environmental theatre is not necessarily directed towards a performance as a 'work', because there is no dividing line in the first place between a work and a non-work. As far as the 'process' of a performance is concerned, every single point in the time-span of the 'process' will be regarded



as 'part of the performance', which implies that someone 'being' herself is indeed a performance. Apart from the fact that such performances may not let improvisatory elements reveal themselves explicitly to everyone, Schechner in Environmental Theater excludes the term 'improvisation' from what he describes as 'process': 'Process is not improvisation or chaos. Both improvisation and chaos are useful sometimes. But process is a conversation between spontaneity and discipline. Discipline without process is mechanical; process without discipline is impossible'.<sup>31</sup> We have to consider exactly what Schechner has in mind when he says 'improvisation' in this context. It may be that the word 'improvisation' is here used for conveying the same meaning as 'spontaneity'. At the same time, the difference between 'process' and 'improvisation' seems to be clear for Schechner in this quote. Improvisatory elements may be popping out at any point of the process but they are not valued in the environmental theatre simply for their flash of insight, however brilliant they may seem at the time. Rather, improvisation will be valuable only when it is recognised as one of the possible ways of making a 'conversation', that is, when 'process' totally envelops improvisation, when improvisation is part of the discipline in the environmental theatre. This 'process', however, is never a fixed notion. If we look at the environmental theatre in the late 1980s, we can see that 'process' itself has changed over the years:

Today's environmental theatre may move the fourth wall around a bit, but no one is put up against or through it. The actors say their lines and go through their routines without being unduly

affected by what the audience does or does not do. 'Confrontation', a term so endemic to the social/political/aesthetic discourse of the '60s, is alien to the new environmentalism. The need to change, provoke, alter, or transform spectators no longer seems central to the aims of many practitioners. 32

Without apparent 'confrontation', the environmental theatre in the late 1980s more sharply focuses on a work as a 'package' (p. 93).

To Schechner, happenings do not conform to any one of his listed headings in the 'performing chart', namely, 'play',<sup>33</sup> 'games', 'sports', 'theatre', and 'ritual'. Meanwhile, a note added to the chart says: 'Happenings would not necessarily have an audience, they would not necessarily be scripted, there would be no necessary symbolic reality. Formally, they would be very close to play' (p. 73). Kirby on his part describes the difference between happenings and a 'traditional theatre' as:

Let us compare a performer sweeping in a Happening and a performer sweeping in traditional theatre. The performer in the Happening merely carries out a task. The actor in the traditional play or musical might add character detail: lethargy, vigor, precision, carelessness. He might act 'place': a freezing garret, the deck of a rolling ship, a windy patio. He might convey aspects of the imaginary time situation: how long the character has been sweeping, whether it is early or late. [. . .] If the action is to sweep, it does not matter whether the performer [in a happening] begins over there and sweeps around here or begins here and works over there. Variations and differences simply do not matter -- within, of course, the limits of the particular action and omitting additional action. The choices are up to him. But he does not work to create anything. The creation was done by the artist when he formulated the idea of the action. The performer merely embodies and makes concrete the idea. 34

Concretising an idea without minding much about an outward shape or about how effectively the action proceeds certainly puts a happening in a position close to 'play'. A traditional theatre,



with its 'mode of representation' being 'stylization despite appearance', <sup>35</sup> operates under a condition in which signification cannot be avoided. Happenings do not demand on the part of a performer the kind of skills which would 'efficiently' signify or represent something. At least in theory, then, actions in happenings will be highly performer-oriented, while the audience, even if they exist, will have a good chance of being left to wonder at the scene they witness; in some cases, we have no way of telling a performer from a non-performer, or a performance from a non-performance:

[. . .] the belly dancer on the back roof let out a scream and crashed through the skylight, falling 12 or 13 feet to the floor below her. She was lying there bleeding and screaming, and everyone in the audience thought it was part of the happening, as indeed it was, though not planned so. A few people fought for a telephone to call police and an ambulance. [. . .] It proved to be a very wicked, superficial cut. At one point I tried to get the entire audience to leave by stepping over Cynthia [the belly dancer], but they remained where they were. In the meantime, the performers themselves weren't too sure whether anything had really happened or not, so they continued to perform. Poons read more from the Dada book. Dick Higgins proceeded to recite poems from his head. People climbed up into trees who had climbed down out of them. At one point a policeman questioning a member of the audience was circled several times by my daughter carrying the candle on the plate and chanting a rock and roll song. It was a fine bit of mayhem and quite abstract. 36

There is a lack of agreement between performers and the audience, or the potential audience, on what constitutes the happening in which they are supposedly participating. There may even be a lack of agreement among performers. A happening actually presupposes such 'misunderstanding'. If happenings and 'improvisation' are to be differentiated, it is partly because in happenings the degree of 'misunderstanding' is often so high and

partly because 'misunderstanding' is what characterises happenings.

In fact, if we leave Kirby's definition for a moment, the term 'happenings' covers a rather wide range of performance. Schechner divides 'happenings' into three categories. The first category is 'the technological, essentially electronic event',<sup>37</sup> whose 'most sophisticated forms include electronic music in an environmental setting' (p. 151). Schechner points out that 'human intentionality' (p. 151) will be 'almost nil' (p. 152) in performances such as some of John Cage's concerts. The second category also is deprived of 'human intentionality', only this time it describes a 'free-for-all happening' (p. 152), in which '[t]he large outlines of the event are known in advance, but the happening may change shape and direction as it proceeds' (p. 152). The above-quoted performance, in which a dancer having an accident inadvertently becomes part of the happening, can be included in this second category. As Schechner notes, '[w]hat happens, happens' (p. 152) in the performances belonging to this category. The third category is 'a combination of the first two' (p. 153), referring to those performances that are neither too 'cold' nor too 'uncontrolled' (p. 153); to Schechner, 'ceremony' (p. 153) is the word that aptly explains the performances in this category. Within the three, the first category seems to have the highest chance of being able to implement the notion of 'improvisation'. It is systematically more viable to make an 'objective' score or script or record involving technology and music, although in this case 'music' may imply something which cannot be dealt with in the traditional sense of music.



Technology, which is capable of shutting out 'human intentionality', on the other hand is supposed to be capable of marking out the 'human' quality: technology and human intentions are, at least in theory, quite different in nature and thus it would be easy for us to recognise one from the other. All these sound academic, however, if we realise that individual happenings in many cases criss-cross the above-mentioned three categories. All we can say is, while nothing hinders the participants of a certain happening from believing that improvisatory actions are taking place, it would somewhat diminish the principles of happenings if improvisation too consciously came up to one's mind.

Pierre Biner uses the word 'improvisation' when describing some of the Living Theatre productions:

[The Marrying Maiden] was the more interesting one from the group's point of view -- opportunities for improvisation were far greater in this play than in The Connection, which had only a few spots that allowed for uncharted stage business and improvised dialogue. The Marrying Maiden turned out to be almost entirely different from one performance to the next. 38

It is clear that a deliberate arrangement is made here to produce 'improvisation' as an inevitable result:

The author [of The Marrying Maiden, Jackson MacLow], drawing on the rules of chance of the hexagrams in the I Ching, constructed six dialogue-and-character scenes. He provided a series of directions for the actors consisting of five degrees of vocal volume and five degrees of tempo in delivery. And, he specified, by means of a hundred adverbs and adverbial phrases, the tone in which certain words or groups of words were to be spoken -- with gaiety, sorrow, and other emotions following each other solely by chance. (p. 55)

This play has a 'text' with mathematical exactness which

instructs the participants how to perform. The text, however, also elicits a 'chance' performance smoothly and naturally. Biner explains that the production explores this combination of specificity and pure chance:

Judith Malina wanted to go even further. She prepared cards of the texts provided by the author for each scene. She then created a special part -- a dice thrower, played by Henry Proach -- and it was his throw of the dice that determined the sequence in which actors, or John Cage's taped 'music', were to be used. Each time Proach threw a seven, he handed a random scene card to an actor, who then performed it. Each time he threw a five the tape recorder was activated -- Cage's 'music' actually consisted of a taped reading of the play, with certain parts electronically distorted by Cage but most of the text remaining audible. (p. 55)

The way they pattern various fragments of actions and arrange 'chance' occurrences is highly technical and even classical in the sense that a parallel can be drawn from the way the *commedia dell'arte* authorised improvisation:

Most histories of the commedia record the deviation and the possible meanings of the word lazzi. Clearly, the word had a multiplicity of meanings even for the commedia performers themselves. Generally, the lazzi can refer to comic routines that were planned or unplanned and that could be performed in any one of dozens of plays. Some were obviously used whenever a scene seemed to drag on too long and were totally improvised by one actor. Others, involving stage properties and several actors, had to be intricately preplanned. Some lazzi could be instigated by a single actor, forcing his unsuspecting partners to improvise around him. 39

Also, the word 'improvisation' seems to be used by Biner here in a narrow and specific sense, pointing to performers' virtuosity in showing their acquired technique at required moments. The patterns have already been learned by performers, who now put them to use. The general idea of using improvisation in the *Commedia* was to satisfy the audience whereas in the Living



Theatre the idea of using improvisation seems to be targeted at 'chance' itself, or more precisely, at the participants actually performing a chance. Another Living Theatre production described by Biner is called The Chord, and this again involves improvisation:

In the chant the actors form a circle, including Julian [Beck] therein. They hold each other by the shoulders. The vertical spotlight used in the preceding scene denotes the boundaries of the circle. They inhale deeply. One of the actors in the circle intones a sound; then the nearest ones listen attentively to that sound and intone sounds of their own; each actor listens with total intensity, while beginning his own sound, to the sounds on his immediate right and left. The chord swells in intensity and volume, then descends gently and fades away. The quality of listening will determine the quality of the response, and the harmony and beauty of the ensemble. The chord is entirely improvised at each performance. (pp. 87-88)

As in The Marrying Maiden, 'improvisation' in this production refers to the kind of improvisatory actions which are straightforward applications of the 'rule'. The Chord can be regarded as a textbook example of an improvisatory performance which sticks to a systematic, game-like structure. In this respect, The Chord again reminds us of the Commedia. In The Brig, the setting of which is a marine corps prison featuring the lives of the prisoners and the guards, improvisatory actions start to show a different dimension:

Rehearsals as well as performances allowed for a certain margin of spontaneity to both guards and prisoners. A prisoner unwittingly stepping on a white line, for example, would evoke an immediate improvised act of punishment from a guard. Consequently, the actors were treading a tightrope that was, in effect, real. The blows may as well have been real, for their psychological effect on actors so involved invariably led to a real reaction, the contraction of muscles, and could not have been much more violent or painful. (p. 70)

The 'spontaneity' in The Brig is partly the result of building a calculated structure which is intended precisely for such 'spontaneity'. In this sense, The Brig can be grouped with The Marrying Maiden and The Chord. Performers being placed under a pressure for some action is also common among these three productions. The difference between The Brig and the other two production is nevertheless clear. In The Marrying Maiden and The Chord such a pressure does not lead to a real physical danger. In other words, the performers are aware of the fact that what they are doing does not affect their physical well-being. The Brig does not draw a clear line which divides performance from reality: performers can be in physical danger. Improvisation can hinge on a reality/performance borderline for reasons other than the possibility of physical endangerment, but this particular reason is arguably the least disguised one. This does not mean that improvisation in The Brig has totally grown out of the 'game' element. 'Real' actions in The Brig continue to enact the rule of the production, which in fact is vital; otherwise, those actions may completely lose control. Improvisatory elements in such a critical circumstance reveal the performer's adequate power and restraint with which she will keep a balance on the edge of the 'performance' framework.

In an interview with Joseph Chaikin, Arthur Sainer asks Chaikin how a work of the Open Theatre begins and if there is a  
 40  
 'structure' to be 'felt'. Chaikin's answer reads:

[. . .] that's more or less what we've been doing at the Open Theatre -- the blank page. In other words, saying 'The material doesn't exist', and we all put our heads together and our bodies



together and see what we can bring into existence. Then we say, 'What's, so to speak, a theme, or what's the central idea or image of the thing?' And the idea is that the theme has to be something which we can connect to, all of us can connect to equally, with equal vitality, and something which at any given, living moment concerns us [. . .]. (p. 3)

Themes, ideas, and images are generated among the performers as they work together. That way, the performers will be able to share the theme. This does not mean that the performers do not need anyone to 'write' for them. Unless the group has somebody who is capable of bringing an idea to the next phase of the formative stage, it seems that the idea does not always develop effectively into an actual piece of work. To use Sainer's words, a 'structure' may be instinctively 'felt' by the performers, but they often need a 'writer' to make the 'structure' workable as a performance piece. As Chaikin says, the 'writer' has to be a participant:

[. . .] we had the skill of a writer coming in and working in relation to us -- we didn't have that skill, not any one of us had the skill and in combination we didn't have the skill -- and, to me, the weakness of the work was generally the degree that the writer was not participating. (p. 3)

Exercises of the Open Theatre often feature improvisation. One of those exercises devised by Nola Chilton is described by Robert Pasolli:

One actor calls the colors and points to other actors, who must immediately make a movement and/or sound which is evoked by the color. The actors should respond impulsively without thinking. They succeed to the extent that they manage to make some physical adjustment to the abstraction. The exercise can be expanded to colors in phrases: barn-door red, instead of just red. 41

Improvising to a colour, or to a specified colour like 'barn-door

red', seems metaphorical; how can a colour be associated with a particular movement/sound? Reading Pasolli's description, however, we realise that the point of the exercise does not centre around how colours can possibly have movement or sound. Rather, introducing colours for improvisation exercises can be regarded as a hand-on, uncomplicated device which prompts performers to make physical movements without first figuring out in their head what the given 'theme' means. If one of the principles of improvisation can be found in the fact that action comes with or before thinking and not after thinking, this exercise proves to be quite efficient. Colours are abstract in one sense but very particular in another and performers are not confined to any rigid rules in their expression of a colour. According to Pasolli, the Open Theatre takes such 'physical adjustment' exercises seriously, which 'led to [Joseph] Chaikin's "sound-and-movement" technique, [. . .] the Open Theatre's basic unit of expression' (p. 4). Exercises eventually outgrow their framework, reaching for the creation of a 'kinetic environment':

From one actor in a pair he [Chaikin] asked for a simple, sharply focused action with the voice and body, an impulsive action neither representative of everyday behavior nor expressive of inner feeling; a pure action, as it were. From the second actor, he asked for an impulsive re-creation of the first actor's statement, an appropriation of its dynamics and form; that is, a response in kind. The whole was to be a transmission of energy and a passing of kinetic material, but with the emphasis on the coming together of two actors who create a dramatic event by 'inhabiting' the same kinetic environment. (p. 4)

Pasolli points out that the 'sound-and-movement' exercises were shown 'as an improvisational statement-of-principles' (p. 7) to the audience, who appreciated their 'novelty, virtuosity, and



energy' (p. 7).

Euridice Arratia describes the rehearsing procedure of the Wooster Group's Brace Up!: 'the live performance, the mediated performance [performers being videoed live onstage], and the sound score are developed simultaneously'.<sup>42</sup> A rehearsal period is a 'process' while at the same time it is a 'form'. The starting point of the production, which is to choose Chekhov's Three Sisters as the 'text', in itself seems to predict a manipulation of a 'form' in the course of the rehearsal period. Arratia reports that mise en scène ceases to be confined to the narrative per se defined by the text of Three Sisters but instead involves what happens on stage as a whole:

Throughout the months I observed rehearsals, these 'game structures' were proposed by [Elizabeth] LeCompte at points when the rehearsal appeared to be stuck and performers seemed to be falling into what she defined as 'a kind of naturalism'. That is, when all the elements of the mise-en-scene [sic] began to function at the same level, threatening to cancel the multiplicity of readings. The game structures had the effect of making the performers refocus on the staging process, concentrating the scattered energy on new modes of dealing with material already familiar. (p. 128)

The 'game structures' transform Chekhov's 'text' in such a way that they 'drive the performers to focus on formal aspects of the piece instead of on interpretation' (p. 128), and in LeCompte's words quoted by Arratia, 'on physical actions instead of emotion' (p. 128). The games are 'to a degree' improvised and the performers keep on adding some 'new elements' (p. 128). One of those games described by Arratia is:

[. . .] [Joan] Jonas as Masha and [Beatrice] Roth as Irina are blindfolded. In order for the action to start, a blindfolded performer has to step on one of several 'x's made of black tape

placed on the stage floor. Once the 'x' is hit, the production manager (Clay Shirky), sitting in the audience area, calls out numbered short sections of the play dubbed 'islands'. Once the number of the island is called out, [Peyton] Smith, standing on mike by the upstage table, cues the performers where exactly in the script to start. This is only the skelton of the game, however. Besides these general, guidelines [sic], there are other rules and intricacies (many of them suggested by the performers) that develop. For example, if after a few minutes a blindfolded performer doesn't step on an 'x', the narrator can do so. Also, time limits are set, and when the time is up, performers have to quit the island they are playing and pass to the next section. (p. 128)

The performers are asked to follow the specific 'rules' of the 'game' rather than pursuing any mental or physical continuity regarding the narrative-related concept of Three Sisters. This is a quite straightforward use of improvisation, namely, demanding the performers to react to an unpredictable, moment-to-moment situation.



#### 4 The Idea of Improvisation in Performance

The preceding chapters took historical, practical, and formal approaches to performance improvisation without actually solving the most fundamental question in our discussion, 'What is performance?'. Indeed, our discussion so far has testified to the diversified nature of 'performance improvisation', while at the same time it has revealed our often intuitive sensitivity which enables us to feel the 'moment' of performance improvisation. Does it mean that we can point to some specific factors that any 'performance' has in common? Can we describe what performance is? In this chapter we will look at the literature that asks this very question, by means of which we will reassess the general idea of performance and that of improvisation.

##### 4.1 What is Performance?

Performance is what the performer generates. Herbert Blau points out, 'A baby may be performing without consciousness, or so it appears [. . .], but what would we know of performance if the world were full of babies.'<sup>1</sup> Granted that consciousness as opposed to unconsciousness cannot always easily be distinguished, we will cast off so-called 'babies' as potential human performers, accepting Blau's premise that an unconscious performance cannot exist. On the other hand, we are not able to dismiss a person in a trance as a performer, which Blau explains:

As with the disenchantments of the world, so with other states of elapsed consciousness. It's the falling away from trance, or its doubling in split consciousness, that makes us aware of trance as performance, as well as the possibility -- engrained in the most skeptical thought of performance, in performance as a thinking

body -- that the world may be tranced. (p. 172)

In a hypothetical world consisting entirely of babies who may or may not be 'performing', with or without consciousness, there would be no one to make a judgement on the issue of performance in the first place. The difference between a baby and a person in a trance lies in the fact that only the latter can change his or her position, that is, only he or she can move backwards and forwards between in-trance and out-of-trance. A person in trance is a potential performer.<sup>2</sup>

It is not a simple question if we ask what the absolute criteria are for deciding what is and what is not a performance. If indeed only non-babies can discuss performance, this suggests the following: the very concept of 'performance' involves a detachment from it, either physically or mentally.

Performance usually presupposes the existence of an audience, but sometimes the same individual acts as an audience as well as a performer. Ronald Hayman summarises Peter Brook's experiments in the 1960s and after, when the group started showing their 'work-in-progress', becoming less and less 'public'-oriented:

Peter Brook had long been aware that actors do most of their best work in the rehearsal room [. . .]. During the first nineteen years of his career (1945-63) Brook was not consistently and resolutely experimental in his approach. But the 1964 [sic] season at the LAMDA Theatre formed a watershed in his development. The programme carried a note comparing the experiment to a scientific research project, and warning the audience that it was watching 'a public session of work-in-progress: improvisation, exploration, and a re-examination of accepted theatre forms'. The critics ignored the admonition reviewing the show as if it were a finished work. Since then Brook has been more wary of exposing actors to the public before preparation has solidified into performance, but he has contrived an artificial situation in which actors can go on working as if they were rehearsing, but without the pressure of having to put



on a show within a limited period. Since he founded the International Centre for Theatre Research in Paris (in 1968) he has tended to spend most of his time working with actors, experimenting, doing exercises, working on lines taken from plays, ideas taken from myths, developing expressive sounds and movements, as alternatives to dialogue, approximating as closely as possible to perfecting the voice and body as performing instruments, but rarely exposing the work in public performances [. . .]. 3

An 'audience' does exist even in these cases: apart from the performers responding to themselves, the director responds to the performers and so do the other members of the company.

The inverse of the above may also be possible. In this case, there would be an audience who are unable to distinguish a performance from a non-performance. In Virginia Woolf's Between the Acts, the setting for a pageant is outside the house:

Rows of chairs, deck chairs, gilt chairs, hired cane chairs, and indigenous garden seats had been drawn up on the terrace. There were plenty of seats for everybody. But some preferred to sit on the ground. Certainly Miss La Trobe had spoken the truth when she said: 'The very place for a pageant!' The lawn was as flat as the floor of a theatre. The terrace, rising, made a natural stage. The trees barred the stage like pillars. And the human figure was seen to great advantage against a background of sky. As for the weather, it was turning out, against all expectation, a very fine day. A perfect summer afternoon. 4

The description already implies a blend of 'stage' and the surrounding countryside, which seems to affect the audience's reaction to the performance of the pageant:

Etty Springett tutted too. [. . .] How difficult to come to any conclusion! She wished they would hurry on with the next scene. She liked to leave a theatre knowing exactly what was meant. Of course this was only a village play . . . They were setting another scene, round the red baize box. She read out from her programme.

'The Picnic Party. About 1860. Scene: A Lake.  
Characters -- '

She stopped. A sheet had been spread on the Terrace. It was a lake apparently. Roughly painted ripples represented water.

Those green stakes were bulrushes. Rather prettily, real swallows darted across the sheet.

'Look, Minnie!' she exclaimed. 'Those are real swallows!'

'Hush, hush,' she was admonished. For the scene had begun. A young man in peg-top trousers and side whiskers carrying a spiked stick appeared by the lake. (p. 98)

A real swallow flying over an artificial lake, a sheet, would not qualify as a performer, since, even if we assumed for the sake of the argument that someone had trained a swallow into such flights, the status of a performer would be given to the trainer rather than the swallow itself. The performer in such a case does not use his or her own body at the moment of the performance but is calling the shots, as it were, from behind. It is not obvious if the character 'Etty Springett' is ready to determine the non-performing/performing status of the swallow. She needs to be certain about the 'meaning' of the play, is aware that it is 'only a village play', is informed of the year and the place of the scene that is about to begin, and is able to see the very artificiality of the 'lake', all of which has to do with the 'performance' initiated by 'performers', including the staff, in one way or another. A sudden, unexpected appearance of real swallows into the supposedly-agreed-upon picture of the 'performance' at least gives a momentary shock to 'Etty'. If she wishes to do so, 'Etty' is free to take the incident of the swallows as part of the 'performance', whether or not she decides to see the swallows as 'performers'. As an audience, she has the right to exercise her own view. The countryside chosen as the setting for the pageant makes it difficult for the audience to draw a line between relevant and irrelevant elements in the performance. Meanwhile, the extent to which the performer



controls the performance and is responsible for the performance can be quite controversial partly because the audience always have their own way of seeing and judging the performance.

Performance in Brook's sense and the pageant-performance in Between the Acts both reflect back on the vulnerability inherent in what we generally call 'performance'. First, there is no sweeping consensus over the use of the term 'performance'; second, since performance is commonly related to 'theatre', or even often represented by it, we feel the need of defining the term 'theatre' at the same time.

Richard Schechner's condensed definition of 'performance' and 'theatre' cited below reads peculiarly drama-oriented, probably because he here takes up the four terms, 'drama', 'script', 'theatre', and 'performance', all side by side:

[. . .] the drama is what the writer writes; the script is the interior map of a particular production; the theatre is the specific set of gestures performed by the performers in any given performance; the performance is the whole event, including audience and performers (technicians too, anyone who is there). 5

To Schechner, 'performance' and 'theatre' can be versatile, evolving, and yet apparently adjustable to specific 'events'. Especially on 'theatre' Schechner writes:

I know an authentic need exists for encounters that are neither just informal person-to-person gatherings like parties nor formal, mediated, programmed routines like office or factory work -- or watching television and films, for that matter. Theatre is a middle world where actual group interaction can happen -- not only through audience participation but by subtler means of audience inclusion and environmental staging; theatre combines artistic-composed behavior with everyday-spontaneous behavior. (p. 94)

The requisite for 'theatre' thus positions itself somewhere between 'informal gatherings' and 'routines'. Michael Kirby also discusses 'theatre' from a slightly different angle, namely, from the psychological viewpoint on the part of the performer:

Is it theatre if a person performs something when alone or if a full rehearsal of a play is conducted without an audience? By our definition, it would be theatre as long as there was the intent to make theatre, to show the performance at some time to an audience. [. . .] The intent must be specific, however -- the intent to make something that will affect an audience. [. . .] The launching of astronauts or of a space shuttle draws a large crowd; people come from thousands of miles away just to see the event. But the launch is not done for the spectators. Its procedures and characteristics are determined by other purposes than to affect the audience. Having an affect does not make the launch theatre. Many things in life affect us without having the intention to do so; some theatre, which by our definition must have the intent to affect us, actually does not affect us at all. It is the intent and not the event itself or its impact on us that makes something theatre. 6

That the intent has to be 'specific' disqualifies an informal party as a theatre since its primary objective should be directed not towards an 'actual group interaction' but towards what will be achieved as a result of an interaction, for example, a feeling shared by the guests that they have had a good time. A routine work, on the other hand, is also disqualified precisely because a routine should eventually produce something, be it material, or physical, or spiritual, or whatever; the process to the finishing goal or how the goal has been achieved is not important as long as the finished state of the routine work is satisfactory. To take an example from a space shuttle launch, when astronauts wave to the people watching them and to the cameras as they walk to the shuttle before the launch, the atmosphere is usually pompous. To some people, the NASA control room shown on television may



have a visual effect similar to theatre. In those respects, there are some theatrical aspects in a space shuttle launch. Still, the ontological goal of the 'mission' remains intact; the pompous aspects of the launch would rather be regarded as a political gesture, which is quite another question related to the so-called 'performance', and we will not pursue it here.

Calling an event 'theatre' or a 'performance' therefore can only be possible when, first of all, we realise the existence of something 'extra' to everyday-life; the potential theatre then materialises when this something extra becomes the main issue and has ceased to be an extra. 'Theatre' or 'performance', however, does not always mean a complete everyday-life-turned-inside-out. Sometimes, everyday-life keeps itself intact while people actively participate in a performance:

Whether in Pittsburgh in 1885, in a New York Yiddish theatre in 1907, in a Federal Theatre Project production in Chicago in 1938, or in a Workers' Stage performance in Newark in 1982, working-class spectators interrupt the show to trade comments with the actors. The actors, trained to expect and even to enjoy such outbursts, might incorporate the remarks into the play, ignore them, or occasionally stop the forward movement of the show and continue their performance on another level entirely -- by talking with the spectators. The mutual feelings of commitment and relationship generated in these encounters are often related to the immediacy of the theatrical effect. After all, if the audience member experienced the conflicts being acted out or if the actor lives and works in the same neighborhood, why not give voice to your emotional response or talk to the actor, your neighbor or co-worker, when he or she is on stage? In theatre for working-class audience, such exchange are not bad manners; they are part of the rules of the game. This last convention, perhaps more than any other, has separated working-class theatre from performances meant for middle-class and ruling-class playgoers. 7

What McConachie and Friedman characterise as 'working-class theatre' may be the product of socio-cultural conditions each

class is subjected to. Because an active 'interruption' is the 'rule', the working-classes described above are quite confident in the way they participate in their theatre. 'Etty' in Between the Acts keeps getting surprised, and sometimes annoyed or disturbed, by what she sees in the pageant precisely because the 'rule' which she thought was clearly understood seems to be deceiving her. In the case of the working-class theatre, the key to calling an event 'theatre' or a 'performance' lies in the 'rules of the game', by which the working classes live.

Augusto Boal relates the rules in theatre to those in sport when he points out that the former 'allow[s] the spectators to know at every performance, the possibilities of the game' while the latter '[do] not hinder the improvisation and surprise of each play'.<sup>8</sup> We have in theatre roughly two ways of dealing with rules: on the one hand, we can live by the rules and enjoy the performance, which is different from but not unlike enjoying a game of football, or on the other hand we can make the rules an issue in themselves by changing them, by trying to break them, in whatever manipulative way. What 'Etty' experiences can be looked at as a performance on the brink of breaking a rule. The problem is, the above two ways do not always emerge separately; it is possible that a single production may contain both, or, further still, the two ways could subtly coexist at the same time in one action. The vulnerability of the terms 'performance' and 'theatre' therefore implies that there never is a singular way of treating any of the rules.

If rules are clearly established ones, they free us from the task of choosing what to see, hear, and how to react; the rules,



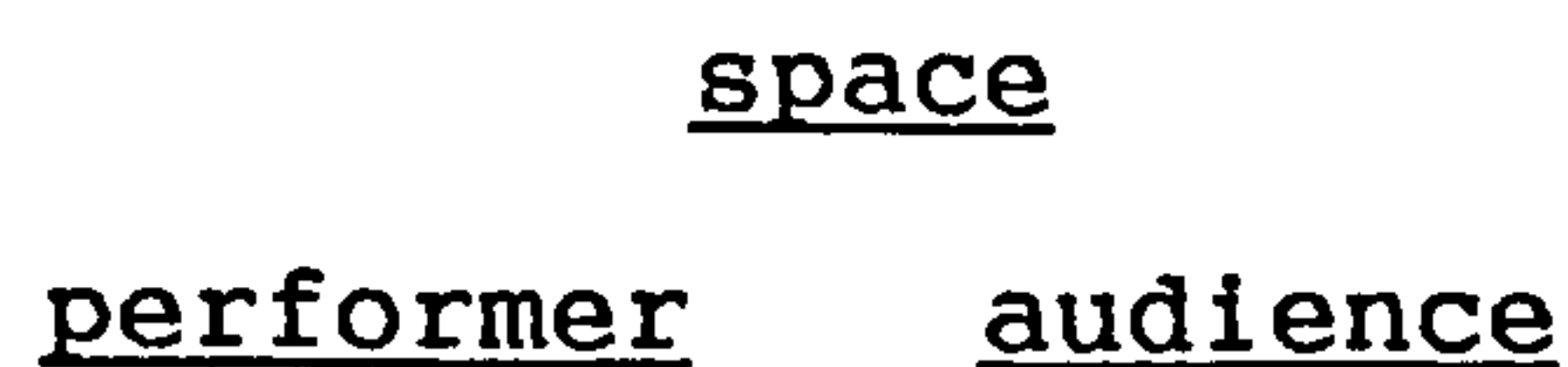
which we are familiar with, have already done the choosing for us. We can therefore concentrate on, for example, a symphony concert either as a member of an orchestra or as an audience without much trouble. A concert also being a performance, care may be taken over the appearance of the players or of the conductor, which might affect the audience's appreciation of the music; still, what eventually matters should be the sound. A fuss made over the appearance of the performers should never overrule our awareness of the importance of the sound that we hear. The hierarchies of importance in a symphony concert are also evident in the rules involved, such as that the audience must try to make as little noise as possible during the performance. The rules are built up in order to let us focus on what is most important.

What Schechner and Kirby call 'performance' or 'theatre' lacks such clearly-discerned hierarchies of appreciation. Part of the reason why we do not need to search for what is important in a symphony concert is that we are given, as an object of appreciation, the 'sound'. Sound is highly abstract and yet also highly physical, something which vibrates our ear drums directly in the form of air pressures; some people may claim that they can visualise the sound of a symphony but it does not necessarily happen nor does it change the status of the sound as of primary importance. With 'performance' in Schechner's sense, we are bound to be left with rather overwhelming circumstances of having almost too many things to appreciate. When Keir Elam describes a kind of hierarchy in 'theatre', we must remember that Elam here

writes about a theatre which is based on 'Western theatrical tradition':

In terms of the performance structure, the automatized state of affairs, in the Western theatrical tradition, occurs when the apex of the hierarchy is occupied by the actor, and in particular the 'lead' actor, who attracts the major part of the spectator's attention to his own person. The bringing of other elements to the foreground occurs when these are raised from their 'transparent' functional roles to a position of unexpected prominence [. . .]. 9

Instead, if we take a hint from Peter Brook's 'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged',<sup>10</sup> we can tentatively make a most simple model of what minimally constitute 'theatre':



A 'space' is offered a vital position in 'theatre', which leads us to believe that 'theatre' requires at least some kind of visualisation on our part, whether we are involved as a performer or as an audience. Although there certainly exists a form of performance which does not rely on any visual means, for example, a radio drama, even in such a case we somehow mentally visualise the picture of the event most likely with the help of the words and sound effects we get on the radio. When the purpose of a radio production leans towards the conveyance of certain sounds from the source to the listener rather than introducing sound as a signifier, it is nearer to the performance of music and is



something out of our present concern. A visualisation presents little difficulty if the performance is clearly rule-bound: we can follow the hierarchy of importance by focussing our visual attention on what should not be missed. Once the rule starts to break, selecting what to see becomes a less easy task, which eventually may result in the audience laden with more information than they can muster.

An 'empty space' actually is a figure of speech; there never exists a 'space' which does not have anything visible in it. A space made up of total darkness or a sheer flood of light can still be called a visible space by its own right, however different the quality of 'vision' may be when compared with a space filled up with concrete objects.

Visual presentation takes many channels. It is possible to think of a performance in which the performer is not visible to the audience but is actively performing; a puppeteer during a performance can be openly visible to the audience, can be partially visible to the audience by revealing part of his or her body, and he or she can also be completely invisible from the audience by hiding somewhere and using the puppets which do not require any physical exposure of any part of the puppeteer's body. Whether or not the audience are conscious of the fact that the puppets are inanimate objects made to look as if they are 'alive' is another matter. The point is, in such forms of performance the inanimate objects move within the constraints of their mechanisms and their functions. The mechanism of a puppet might reflect fairly simply the physical movements of the puppeteer's hand as in the case of puppets in Sesame Street; a

puppet might be two-dimensional as in the case of puppets used in a shadow play in Indonesia. In any case, the way those puppets move around in a space can never exceed what they are mechanically capable of doing. The audience are free to 'feel' anything they like from the space occupied by a puppet, but their sensations will be affected by the mechanical constraints of the puppet.

Even if we physically put an actual human performer in the 'space', constraints will not disappear altogether. A human being as a performer in a 'space' also has physiological limitations. Visual presentations cannot go beyond the capacity of a human body. On the other hand, a human body in space cannot completely hide what it is. A human performer generates movement which is plastic in nature, and plasticity is not what a puppet usually possesses. Such characteristics, though, may or may not be immediately apparent to the eye; it partly depends on what a performer wears, or does not wear, on his or her person. There might be a point when a hidden performer handling a puppet cannot be distinguished from a performer who is exposed in space but is completely clad in some material and is supposed to represent a non-human being, for example, a bear or an angel. The difference among these marginal cases can be regarded more as a difference of degree rather than that of quality.

An immovable, inanimate object in space, such as a mannequin in a showcase, usually offers less visual information than a flexible, animate body in space does; the organic nature of human being is such that no one can ever really stop moving every part



of her body nor can anyone repeat exactly the same movement twice. As long as she breathes, she is moving. This, at least in theory, results in a rich visual revelation for a person observing that particular body. To what extent the audience are allowed to observe a performer, or a performer is allowed to observe another performer, varies according to the dynamics involving space, the performer, and the audience. Given this, we suspect that an uncertainty towards a performer's body is most likely to be felt when we do not have well-established rules in experiencing the performance. Johannes Birringer sums up:

As a form of cultural production, the textlessness of performance art generally shifts critical attention toward the visual, or toward the perceived relationship between body, space, sound, light, and objects. This attention to the visual construction of the performances, and the functional relationships between the manipulation or display of the body and the manipulation of space, must be considered crucial in terms of the historical trajectory of performance art. 11

Birringer states that a human body is bound to be read as a code, which suggests that we are always 'reading' a performer one way or another:

[. . .] historical semiotics and structural anthropology today, supported by a Lacanian psychoanalytic theory of the psyche as representation or a kind of generalized sign economy that only touches upon the physical body at points where it is socially coded and gendered, would confirm our suspicion that the body, or a 'natural' body, never existed. Performers have always only performed representations of bodies inscribed by language, theatrical codes, and gestural/corporeal stances, and imprinted by history. (p. 212)

The problem is, without a firm rule in observing a performance, a code will only function in fragments. It will not be consistent throughout the performance nor will it remain stable for the

audience to rely upon its significance:

[W]here theatre is concerned, we must accept the fact that, on stage, there are no non-significant elements, none independent of all sign relation, for instance, no purely physiological codes. And we accept that we are in a particular discursive universe where the elements have been chosen specifically for the spectator to observe and interpret them during the theatrical event. [. . .] We presuppose that the elements on stage are already significative and that we are dealing with pre-established sign relations. Again, in contrast to linguistic theory, we cannot accept a single code -- the verbal, for example -- as being fundamental, but will have to employ a multitude of codes, changes in codes, and levels of codes. 12

Herbert Blau apparently pushes what Peter Brook says about the 'theatre' further forward, putting a particular emphasis on the 'presence' of the body in the space:

The actor is there (each one) before the space. The space is there, but it must be carved out. The Burrow is not-there until it is constructed. Silence. The actor moves (or is moved?) into the space. [. . .] Now, the space is established -- until the other moves (each one). The step might have been retracted like the first word X'd out on an empty page, but while the page can be torn up, nobody the wiser, the actor is out there, seen, the others there -- the very pulse of thought is an observance, the flick of an eye; nor can the step really be retracted if you think. From any point of view, the structure extends, infinitely, breathing and being breathed, in thought, undeniably there. The structure is very simple, elemental, minimalist -- but it is a power structure. Absolute. [. . .] The entire being of the actor is summoned in the process of becoming to keep the structure as-it-was. 13

We can argue that the body's tangible presence in the space is what distinguishes 'performance' or 'theatre' from a film.

However, if we really want to pursue this point, it will first have to be realised that we, as an audience, do not usually 'touch' the performer in its literal sense of the word; seeing a performer in a space and seeing a person on film actually come from the same action on our part, that is, taking in some visual



information from the stage or the screen. The line to be drawn between the two rather has to do with the 'time' which the performer and the audience respectively go through. If we turn to Blau again: '[t]he theatre is a far more skeptical form than film, by nature, whatever else is imposed upon it -- film having emerged in consonance with the novel out of the fictive aspirations of the legacy of romance. In theatre, the body's specific gravity is always there, subject to time, astride of a grave.'<sup>14</sup> To say that a body is present in a space inevitably means that the body is sharing the 'present' time, and the space, with its observer. A performer often represents a character who is supposed to be living in some fictional time or some fictional space, but the performer's 'present' existence in the 'present' space can be recognised at the same time. Julian Beck writes:

When I come out of the cinema I have a sense of having lost time and when I come out of the theater after a play I have the sense of having gained it. [. . .]  
Time in the theater is real, time in the cinema illusory.  
The theater is primary, consequently it is first of all SPACE. [. . .]

In the cinema it's all surprise, rapid, image after image. In the cinema it is images. In the theater it is the living actress [sic], blood-filled flesh and consciousness. Yet both are dream states, like variant phases of sleep. In one the body is alert and the mind mostly at rest, in the other the dream is visualized but the body is in repose. 15

The exposure of an animate body can arouse a feeling which comes directly from the fact that a performing human body is presently alive, subject to death; Blau writes, 'there is something lethal in a pure physiology of performance -- a desideratum of material murmurs that speak of forgetfulness and

death'.<sup>16</sup> Since a performer and an audience both have human bodies, it would be easy for an audience to quasi-experience a performer's actions not only on an emotional level but on a physical level as well.<sup>17</sup> What the performer's body experiences can somehow be 'felt' by the audience as if the same thing has almost happened to them, and there are many ways of eliciting that feeling. Some films deliberately target such reactions. Hence there are people who wince at a scene in a film, for example, of an injured person in a treatment room in hospital; even though the film is a total fiction and thus the viewer is supposed to be cognisant of the fact that the 'injured' person is actually only pretending, he or she could still quasi-experience the 'pain' of that 'injured' person especially when the scene is made to look extremely real. This might lead us to a conclusion that a 'human body' in an intricate animated cartoon will more likely be successful in evoking a sense of quasi-experience than a real human body in a very formal performance ever will. As we have already seen, however, a film does not share the present time with us. Only when the performer and the audience live in the same space and time do the feeling of being alive and the feeling towards death become boldly imminent both for the performer and the audience. In Peter Brook's words: 'The theatre [. . .] always asserts itself in the present. This is what can make it more real than the normal stream of consciousness. This also is what can make it so disturbing.'<sup>18</sup>

This does not mean that the audience must have a stock of experiences from every conceivable field of human affairs and



problems in order to fully appreciate, that is, quasi-experience, everything the performer does. On the contrary, we are more likely to witness a performance in which the movements by a performer happen to be so technically accomplished that he or she nearly looks non-human. The artistic charm emitted by a pianist playing a Prokofiev concerto or by a dancer dancing to a Prokofiev melody can find its solid basis only in the pianist's or the dancer's technique of incarnating and interpreting Prokofiev's music in the way people taking a piano or a ballet lesson on a casual basis never could. Such pianists or dancers would be appreciated at least in part because 'lay' people will not be able to do the same thing. We wonder at a performance which hardly seems possible but apparently is possible for the performer. However, we sometimes inadvertently witness a human side of such performers, their 'material murmurs' that even suggest a death, in a mishap during the performance; a dancer trips, a horn playing in an orchestra fails to hit the correct note at the most important moment in a symphony. If the 'lay' people could ever quasi-experience what goes on inside the performers, these accidents may be the only possible chances for us. Such human errors have to do with a failure in executing a technique, something to which any human being could connect himself or herself, based on his or her own experience in failing to execute a technique properly.

This is not to say that making a human error in a concert or in the ballet can be regarded as a positive aspect of the performance. The fact is quite the opposite: a piano or an orchestra score, by its nature, distinguishes the 'right' sound

from the 'wrong' sound, and a tightly choreographed ballet piece makes one misstep obvious to a person who knows the piece. Mistakes in such performances will always be foregrounded as nothing but mistakes. Still, we must realise that making mistakes in fact does not automatically label the performance a 'failure'; if the performance is radiant with an overall grasping of the piece or with whatever kind of charm which is strong enough to compensate mistakes, we may still enjoy the concerto or the ballet as a well-performed Prokofiev piece. In the case of a performance which does not offer a crystal-clear score or its equivalent to the audience, how are we to know if what we are seeing at this moment is not quite what the performer first intended? The same question actually can be asked to the performer; does it matter if what he or she performs turns out to be something that was carefully planned or something which slightly went astray from the plan? These questions will be asked when a performance features solely the human body in motion. When the handling of objects or instruments are concerned, mistakes are easier to detect. Considering that 'mistakes' in the movement of the human body, including some unintended coordinations of various parts of the body, are still movements that fall within the range of possibilities of the human body, we might even claim that a human performance without clear-cut rules can be described as an anything-goes situation, so-called 'mistakes' forming part of it. In reality, 'perfection' envisioned by a performer rarely happens. When 'perfection' seems to descend on her, the chances are that she



already is on her way to yet another, different kind of 'perfection'.

Our general notion towards 'performance' or 'theatre' assumes the parallel existence of non-performance or non-theatre. We also generally refer to the non-performance part of the world as 'reality'. The body is a reality in a space. The question is, can the performance or the theatre in Schechner's and Kirby's sense be called a reality simply because of the body's presence? We could reach a simple solution to this question if we were able to see a 'performance' as a totally detached object, that is, if a performance could be appreciated in the way not unlike we appreciate a 19th-century painting which originally had decorated a wall of someone's living room but presently is hung as a work among other paintings. It is difficult to put ourselves in a completely detached position when we are participating in, or even simply witnessing, a performance or a theatre. Even if we try hard not to connect what is being performed with our 'reality', for example, our daily chores, the very presence of the body in the shared space, especially the fact that we would quite easily be led into a quasi-experience, will hinder us from detaching ourselves. Blau describes this point as follows:

The forms of theater in turn depend on their attitude toward this appearance. With the ideological consciousness of the postmodern theater -- where performance is more or less dissociated from theater -- we have seen various attempts to minimize the look by exaggerating it or playing with it, if not insisting on its extrusion on behalf of demystification: this being theater, and that being reality. But the reality is immense, and like the slippage of the signifiers, not that, this, not this, that, the trouble with appearance is that it always gets in the way. 19

If we apply Blau's 'appearance' specifically to human appearance,

interpreting it as a human body being observed in space, 'appearance' will always hinder our attempt in deciding on the non-reality, or the reality, of the performance. In fact, as Charles Marowitz explains, such co-existence, or overlapping existence, of alleged reality and alleged non-reality does seem to be one of the factors by mean of which the theatre attracts people:

On the variety stage, there was no pretence about fictional situations. The music hall performer was patently on that stage, playing to that audience; his only gesture to make-believe was the painted drop behind him. His theatre was as vitally existential as Brecht's tried to be; as Meyerhold's was. And yet, the music hall public was transported; the illusion created; the reality of the present moment transcended. Illusion is not the exclusive property of the stage; it is the built-in predisposition of the spectator. If one wanted to remove it really, one would have to lacerate the viscera of a man's imagination. But as long as that remains intact, everything that unfolds on a stage will be somewhat magical; somewhat unreal; somewhat illusionary -- and still thoroughly credible. 20

There seems to be a tendency for people to create illusions even in non-illusionary settings of theatre. Hence 'reality' is everywhere, or, if expressed the other way, 'reality' is nowhere.

Paul Thom asks about the relationship between performer and performance as follows: 'since performance is activity, not just the representation of activity, the performer's body is part of the being of the performance, not merely part of its cause. Thus it seems that there is in every performance another duality, namely, that between the performer's being and the performer's merely representing something. Can there be artistic performance without representation?' 21 In other words, can a human body not represent anything outside of itself?



Although many people start their discussions on theatrical representation by quoting Antonin Artaud, that might not be very useful unless the quotation is carefully chosen: Artaud's writings actually are a problem by themselves. When Thom comments, 'Well, despite Artaud, might there not be an entirely nonrepresentational performance?' (p. 142), he seems to suggest that the possibility of nonrepresentational performance has been rejected by Artaud; on the other hand, Steven Connor asserts that Jacques Derrida's writing on Artaud 'point[s] out that Artaud's theatre of cruelty is, in fact, an impossibility. No matter how intensely spontaneous, or unpreconditioned, any act of theatre might seem, it must always to some degree involve representation and repetition, by virtue of the fact of being theatre,'<sup>22</sup> by which we assume that Artaud's theatre of cruelty is supposed to be nonrepresentational for Derrida. Artaud himself writes:

If fundamental theatre is like the plague, this is not because it is contagious, but because like the plague it is a revelation, urging forward the exteriorisation of a latent undercurrent of cruelty through which all the perversity of which the mind is capable, whether in a person or a nation, becomes localised.<sup>23</sup>

The theatre being a 'revelation' seems to imply that, first, the 'fundamental' theatre's role is to uncover what has been covered so far and, second, there undeniably has to be an inherent 'something' which has only awaited substantiation. In explaining the theatre of cruelty, Artaud puts his proposal about the possibilities for theatre the following way:

Theatre can still derive possibilities for extension from speech outside words, the development in space of its dissociatory, vibratory action on our sensibility. We must take inflexion into account here, the particular way a word is pronounced, as well as

the visual language of things (audible, sound language aside), also movement, attitudes and gestures, providing their meanings are extended, their features connected even as far as those signs, making a kind or [sic] alphabet out of those signs. Having become conscious of this spatial language, theatre owes it to itself to organise these shouts, sounds, lights and onomatopoeic language, creating true hieroglyphs out of characters and objects, making use of their symbolism and interconnections in relation to every organ and on all levels. (p. 69)

Artaud insists that such creation would be 'of no use' without 'a kind of real metaphysical temptation' (p. 69) since 'what matters is that our sensibility is put into a deeper, subtler state of perception by assured means, the very object of magic and ritual, of which theatre is only a reflection' (p. 70). Considering that in his writings Artaud repeatedly uses the word 'poetry'<sup>24</sup> to describe theatre, what he pursues in theatre seems to be something extremely refined but still very much down to earth, something that can deliver a direct and therapeutic sensation. The performing body, then, exists in a space to evoke such a sensation. In that sense, Artaud's theatre of cruelty is, as Derrida writes, 'not a representation'<sup>25</sup> but 'archi-manifestation of force or of life' (p. 238), since 'nonrepresentation is [. . .] original representation, if representation signifies, also, the unfolding of a volume, a multidimensional milieu, an experience which produces its own space' (p. 237). Paul Thom's supposition that, like 'the project of "absolute" music and the project of "concrete" art', nonrepresentational performance would be something of a 'purism'<sup>26</sup> therefore refers to a pure fantasy, something which we can reflect on but cannot put into action. A performing body will always represent and signify itself in performance.



What is 'performance'? If we argue that a performer cannot but represent, the question of what 'performance' is will be replaced by the acknowledgement of that particular argument. Read from such a point of view, Michael Chekhov's description of 'performance' is quite exhaustive:

The performance is the idea, the 'what', the realm of feelings, the atmosphere, and the will. Everything which we can see on the stage with our eyes, everything that is audible, belongs to the realm of the will of the performance. It moves, it is there, it is a constant process. 27

Also indicating the same principle, Richard Schechner manages to sum up 'performance':

Playing is a mood, an attitude, a force. It erupts or one falls into it. It may persist for a fairly long time -- as specific games, rites, and artistic performances do -- or it comes and goes suddenly -- a wisecrack, an ironic glimpse of things, a bend or crack in behavior. 28

#### 4.2 Improvisation: Revealing the Nature of Performance

Bertolt Brecht touches upon the question of what 'theatre' must offer:

Even the street-corner demonstration includes artistic elements. Artistic abilities in some small degree are to be found in any man. It does no harm to remember this when one is confronted with great art. Undoubtedly what we call artistic abilities can be exercised at any time within the limits imposed by our street scene model. They will function as artistic abilities even though they do not exceed these limits [. . .]. And true enough, the epic theatre is an extremely artistic affair, hardly thinkable without artists and virtuosity, imagination, humour and fellow-feeling; it cannot be practised without all these and much else too. It has got to be entertaining, it has got to be instinctive. 29

Exactly how the 'entertaining' element of theatre should mingle

with Brecht's epic theatre is not our present concern; instead, we can focus on the fact that Brecht takes the entertaining aspect of theatre quite seriously. Herbert Blau points out: '[Brecht] understood that if one wants the theater to be explicitly instructive, the means to that end had better delight. The deeper pleasures of theater may be more perverse, but whatever the inheritance of ritual purpose, one goes there for pleasure as well.'<sup>30</sup> The elements of 'entertainment' and 'pleasure', although they would locate the theatre in one fundamental human desire, still leave us with only a vague idea of why we keep returning to theatre without being forced to do so. 'Pleasure' implies our instinctive preference towards something which we would rather see or experience in theatre over something else which we would rather not see, or something which we would not particularly care if we see it or not. When Lars Kleberg explains Sergey Eisenstein's theatre, we can interpret 'attraction' as one way of enacting 'pleasure':

In his manifesto Eisenstein had introduced the term 'attraction' to designate the minimal unit of a performance, by which he meant any strong sensual or psychological shock on the spectator through which the director structures the play. Although the term was new in the theatrical context (it was borrowed from the circus), Eisenstein maintained that the phenomenon itself was old. 'Attractions' included an actor's diction and the colour of the prima donna's tights, Romeo's monologue as well as firecrackers underneath the spectators' seats. Whereas attractions were earlier used as a means of mimetic, realistic illustration, the theatre Eisenstein wanted to develop was based on the 'free montage of arbitrarily selected independent . . . effects (attractions)'.<sup>31</sup>

It is not enough, therefore, that theatre simply exists in a space for the performer and the audience; theatre can work,



according to the statements cited above, effectively only when it 'shocks' people. The shock, Eisenstein seems to imply, may precisely be the element that shaped theatre in the first place and has let the theatre survive. As Richard Schechner points out: '[t]heatre history can be given an overall shape as a development along a core which is a braided structure constantly inter-relating efficacy and entertainment'.<sup>32</sup> If people get a shock which they duly expected to get, the satisfaction of having what they wanted is sensed as pleasure. The 'attraction', or the 'shock', does not confine itself in overtly visual or sensual means, such as a surprising and dangerous-looking movement of the body, but it also works in subtler, and possibly more lasting ways, such as that which Eugenio Barba calls a power of 'seduction'.<sup>33</sup> Barba elaborates on it:

Faced with certain actors, a spectator is attracted by an elementary energy which seduces without mediation, even before he has deciphered the individual actions or questioned himself about their meaning and understood it. [. . .] The flow of energies which characterize our daily behaviour has been derailed. The tensions which secretly govern our normal way of being physically present, come to the surface in the actor, become visible, unexpectedly. (pp. 13-14)

'Seduction' in Barba's sense still is an incarnation of 'shock'; unless the performer shakes off what constitutes an outwardly 'normal' human being and reveals what is always there but is hidden inside him or her, we would not be 'seduced'. Being seduced means the shock of seeing what we usually do not get to see, which subsequently might prompt a sense of pleasure.

Jerzy Grotowski talks about theatre from a slightly different point of view, that is, directing attention to the rapport

among the participants and, as it were, within their 'selves':

The core of the theatre is an encounter. The man who makes an act of self-revelation is, so to speak, one who establishes contact with himself. That is to say, an extreme confrontation, sincere, disciplined, precise and total -- not merely a confrontation with his thoughts, but one involving his whole being from his instincts and his unconscious right up to his most lucid state. 34

Robert L. Benedetti also alludes to 'encounter', which in this case is a rapport between a performer and a viewer: 'We confront the actor in an uncapturable, unrepeatable moment in time when his mortality, heightened and clarified by his art, confronts our own. This human encounter will increasingly be the basis for our theatre in years to come.' 35 Both uses of the word 'encounter' can be interpreted as trying to say the same thing as Artaud's concept of the theatre of cruelty, only that Grotowski and Benedetti rephrase Artaud on the level of individual performers and members of the audience. 'Encounter' is a highly charged exchange of what a performer needs to get and what she needs to give: a performer demands of her co-performers, of the audience, of some elements in the world, or of herself what she desperately needs in order to live the 'moment' of a performance, while she also has to give as much help to others and to herself so that the 'moment' will be fully shared and experienced. Without such an element in theatre, there can be no potentiality of shock or seduction either. Grotowski emphasises a performer's 'technical competence' 36 in such an encounter, which supports our discussion on the technique of performance improvisation in chapter 2.

Theatre cannot necessarily be called a failure even when it shows a serious 'flaw' in any part of its structure. Seen on the



whole, theatre is more like a complicated and disproportionate mixture of what operates 'successfully' and what does not. As Meyerhold states, there can never be a complete unity of every element in the theatre: 'The theatre is constantly revealing a lack of harmony amongst those engaged in presenting their collective creative work to the public. One never sees an ideal blend of author, director, actor, designer, composer and property-master. For this reason, Wagner's notion of a synthesis of the arts seems to me impossible.'<sup>37</sup> An incomplete theatre is still capable of shocking and seducing people. However, unless it can find ways of focussing its 'attractions', an incomplete theatre will always be boring and fail to hold its audience. The theatre's search of effective means of 'attraction' is embodied in a theatrical 'form'; we might even be able to say that finding a suitable form means discovering the way through to shock people. Meyerhold in the following supports such presumption:

In the pantomime, the spectator is gripped not by the plot but by the manner in which the actor's free inspiration manifests itself through his sole desire to dominate the stage [. . .] Pantomime excites not through what is concealed within it but by how it is created, by the framework which confines its heart, by the skill of the actor revealed through it. The actor's movements vary according to his costume, the properties and the setting. Far from arbitrary, costume is an integral part of the production; its cut and colour are of utmost importance. Make-up, too, is relative -- there are masks and masks. Theatricality presupposes an inevitability of form. 38

Grotowski also discusses 'form':

This elaboration of artificiality -- of the form's guiding rein -- is often based on a conscious searching of our organism for forms whose outlines we feel although their reality still escapes us. One assumes that these forms already exist, complete, within our organism. Here we touch on a type of acting which, as an

art, is closer to sculpture than to painting. Painting involves the addition of colours, whereas the sculptor takes away what is concealing the form which, as it were, already exists within the block of stone, thus revealing it instead of building it up. 39

'Form' is not to be considered in simple terms of opposition to content but more in line with Blau's definition: '[t]he disfigurement itself is an irruption of new content. It is also a breach of form trying to erase the difference between form and content.'<sup>40</sup>

According to Jean-Paul Sartre, theatre is 'gesture', which 'can't be exactly defined as something which is not an act, for acts are often gestures too' but 'is an act which has no purpose in itself, an action, a movement intended to show something else'.<sup>41</sup> The following words by Blau seem to imply this point:

I am particularly interested in the irruptive source of the theater's most compelling power, cutting across the pleasures of any of its various modes. As in the splitting action of the nuclear dream, there is the precipitating moment when, from whatever prior substance (or illusion of priority), it identifies or reveals or betrays itself as theater. 42

Meanwhile, Blau also detects a somewhat wishful tendency within theatre towards 'something other than theater, if not in the symbolist spirit of music, then specifically more like life, though even in the spirit of realism it encounters life as a dream'.<sup>43</sup> Here, 'life' seems to refer to 'being' not yet represented in any form.

Theatre never becomes life itself. While we are facing theatre, we are pouring what Blau calls 'memories' into what we witness, and Blau even goes as far as asserting that 'theater is, in whatever revisionist, futurist, or self-dissolving form -- or



in the most proleptic desire to forget the theater -- a function of remembrance. Where memory is, theater is.'<sup>44</sup> Here, 'memory' does not only mean a recollection of specific events, dates, situations or experience related to what we see in the theatre. An individual who participates in the theatre lives through his or her own moment of 'memory' incited by that particular theatre. We can turn to Woolf's Between the Acts for an example of such 'memories'. 'Mrs. Lynn Jones', one of the guests at the pageant performance, goes through her own memories when the scene of praising 'home' finishes:

The gramophone warbled Home, Sweet Home, and Budge, swaying slightly, descended from his box and followed the procession off the stage.

There was an interval.

'Oh but it was beautiful,' Mrs. Lynn Jones protested. Home she meant; the lamplit room; the ruby curtains; and Papa reading aloud.

[. . .]

But Mrs. Lynn Jones still saw the home. Was there, she mused, as Budge's red baize pediment was rolled off, something -- not impure, that wasn't the word -- but perhaps 'unhygienic' about the home? Like a bit of meat gone sour, with whiskers, as the servants called it? Or why had it perished? Time went on and on like the hands of the kitchen clock. [. . .] If they had met with no resistance, she mused, nothing wrong, they'd still be going round and round and round. The Home would have remained; and Papa's beard, she thought, would have grown and grown; and Mama's knitting -- what did she do with all her knitting? 45

Her chain of memories, first brought about by 'Budge' and 'Home, Sweet Home', is actually leading 'Mrs Lynn Jones' to a purely personal world which cannot possibly be experienced by any other person. Her memories have little to do with the pageant which she is presently seeing. A theatre of any kind exists precisely for such moments of living one's memories; as Blau states: 'we realize that we are enacting a text in the theatre even when

there is no text. What is delivered from the brain back to the mind is a sense of all behavior, every sound. It is, if it can be imagined, the source of our idea of illusion. If it can't be imagined, it is a very shallow play.<sup>46</sup> Whether 'memories' come out or not will be the watershed for the theatre if it intends to 'shock' people.

At first glance, improvisation seems primarily to explore physical as well as psychological 'memories'. Does it mean that improvisation is mainly a repetition, a 'moment' of being reminded of a known physical sensation, a 'moment' of re-experiencing certain sensations physically as well as mentally? Alan Read defines improvisation as '[relying] on a "saying" rather than the "said",<sup>47</sup> which places improvisation opposite repetition. Read explains:

The said is the discourse that is translatable, transferable and performable. The saying is the speech act itself that resists removal from its context however banal that arena might be. [. . .] Saying is more than speaking, it is a way of giving everything, of not keeping anything for oneself, and here embraces and challenges the politics of quietude. The 'said' of theatre exists in its repetition and reproduction; the 'saying' in its improvisation and innovation. It is in the everyday that the saying often discreetly occurs in and around the ethical relation. It resides in the micro-gestures of society, not in its flamboyant theatrical expressions concretised as the discourse of theatre. (p. 95)

Read's viewpoint basically parallels J. L. Austin's speech-act theory in that a speech act for Austin always works within a certain context: 'to be performative a statement must be spoken "seriously" and not be a joke or used in a play or poem'.<sup>48</sup> Such an emphasis on the context-ridden aspect of improvisation helps us appreciate the special, ephemeral quality of each single



'moment', but it also undermines the very reason for a performer's polishing her improvisatory technique. Meanwhile, Derrida attacks the very concept of placing speech acts opposite theatre. Theatre can be levelled with speech acts if we choose to regard speech acts not exclusively as acts having a purpose for themselves but also as a means of representation. To Derrida, speech acts are repeatable, which is precisely what makes the speech seriously 'performative'.<sup>49</sup> 'Saying', if we follow his assertion, possesses the aspect of 'said' after all. Accordingly, performance improvisation relies both on the power of 'memories' and on the power of once-only 'moment'.

The question of repeatability should not be underestimated. 'Repeatability' and 'spontaneity' presuppose each other; improvisation looks most 'seducing' when things are repeated, when 'spontaneity' has something solid like a canon to fall back on. In Hollis Huston's metaphorical expression, the inevitability of repetition in improvisation is implied: 'A man walks across the stage. He walks across the stage again. The same man, walking in the same direction, in the same style, at the same tempo -- but we all know that it is not the same, the man wears his difference on his sleeve.'<sup>50</sup> Herbert Blau views repetition in theatre as a solution to what might become an everlasting suspension of seeking for the so-called 'truth':

As we could see way back in the stichomythia of Greek drama, the almost catechistic repetitions of what is surely clear to the audience, there is something of ritual purpose -- and a perverse quotient of pleasure -- in the deferral of the self-evident. [. . .] Obvious as it is, the theatre compulsively replays it, with more or less transgressive variations (historical and cultural) on the unavoidable theme, which is what we do with the

hidden banality of any repellent truth. The dramatic theatre is most guilty of this compulsion, but no theatre is entirely free of it, neither the compulsion nor the guilt [. . .]. Saving desire from the warp of desire, it thus authenticates repression, and with it -- through the most strenuous and subversive resistance to its own illusory power -- the (dis)rupture of representation. 51

'Spontaneity' is an experiment conducted under an enormous pressure of having to fill in the slot of infinite monotony.

Improvisation, with its repetitive and once-only dichotomy, allows us to live 'memories' in a psychosomatic manner, that is, to live the 'moment' of a performance. Improvisation is an encounter, a shock, revealing the very nature of performance.

#### 4.3 The Idea of Improvisation

Nikolai M. Gorchakov says of improvisation, 'You should not  
52  
prepare yourself for it'. He explains:

When we started our impromptus the first time, you tried to think them up. I don't deny the importance of thinking, inventing or planning, but if you have to improvise on the spot [. . .], you must act and not think. It's action we must have -- wise, foolish or naive, simple or complicated, but action. (p. 140)

Gorchakov attributes the above observation to Yevgeny Vakhtangov. In terms of the apparent supremacy of 'action' over 'thinking', one thing is quite clear here: according to Gorchakov, and Vakhtangov, any 'unprepared' action would be better than a 'thinking-and-acting' if that action is going to be called an improvisation. Does 'thinking' only numb one's action and thus should be contained somewhere below the level of one's consciousness? Are improvisatory action and 'thinking' incompatible? Herbert Blau claims that the two are in fact incompatible:



The hardest thing for the actor to learn is -- once the verbalizing of reflection begins -- to keep speaking, not to stop, the temptation being at first to withdraw into internalizing thought. The actor will justify it with the conventional rationalization about not being 'prepared' yet to speak. In this work, that preparation is not only a hindrance, but an irrelevance. 53

The vital importance in improvising will be to keep on acting, be it a physical movement or a verbal speech, and never to create a void by stopping what one is doing. During a void, we may not even be 'thinking' but instead may possibly be 'blank' in mind and petrified in body. When whatever has been going on ceases to proceed, the standstill breaks a certain rhythm and the general flow of the performance.

Some forms of theatre serve as a basis for an overt or an intentionally devised improvisation better than some other forms do. In a tightly scripted play, for example, an improvisatory movement is not a priority, simply because the play otherwise could not be so 'tightly' scripted. Julian Beck takes up an allegedly 'improvised' nature of Pirandello's Tonight We

<sup>54</sup>  
Improvise: the whole structure of the play reflects on a classic improvisatory situation, which is made possible by the tightly-specified script. On the other hand, it would be quite difficult for the performers to improvise without any script whatsoever or without any agreed-upon guideline. A preferable situation for improvising would lie somewhere between the above two extremes; one example is cited by Beck: 'With The Brig came The Living Theatre's first important art-of-acting discovery. Kenneth Brown had written a play in which the action was bound by

rules, but within those rules only improvisation was possible. He provided a situation in which improvisation was essential. It was real' (p. 80). As we saw in chapter 3, The Brig may be regarded as a 'test' to show that improvisation, however 'essential', still abides by the rules in order not to lose control. On the more technical side of improvisation, Viola Spolin takes up the issue of 'pre-planning', which she asserts should only help a performer build a 'structure':

Pre-planning how to do something throws the players into 'performance' and/or playwriting, making the development of improvisers impossible and preventing the player in the formal theater from spontaneous stage behavior. [. . .] Pre-planning constitutes the use of old material even if that material is but five minutes old. Pre-planned work on stage is the result of a rehearsal even if that rehearsal was but a few seconds of mental visualization. [. . .] Pre-planning is necessary only to the extent that the problems should have a structure. The structure is the Where, Who, and What plus POC [the Point of Concentration]. 55

According to Keith Johnstone, it is the performers themselves who make use of 'offers', or make a preferable improvisation out of seemingly non-preferable offers:

[An improvising performer] may accept offers which weren't really intended. I tell my actors never to think up an offer, but instead to assume that one has already been made. [. . .] Once you learn to accept offers, then accidents can no longer interrupt the action. When someone's chair collapsed Stanislavsky berated him for not continuing, for not apologising to the character whose house he was in. This attitude makes for something really amazing in the theatre. The actor who will accept anything that happens seems supernatural; it's the most marvellous thing about improvisation: you are suddenly in contact with people who are unbounded, whose imagination seems to function without limit. 56

Unless the performers possess a receptive 'sense' of coping with each small incident in the theatre, it is not possible to



introduce the kind of improvisation which, in Spolin's words, is part of 'deeper experiences'.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, when the flexibility on the part of a performer is generated fully, the result will look less like an improvisatory action, which Spolin explains as follows: 'Spontaneous blocking appears to be carefully rehearsed when players are truly improvising' (p. 157). Johnstone says virtually the same thing: 'Good improvisers seem telepathic; everything looks prearranged. This is because they accept all offers made -- which is something no 'normal' person would do'.<sup>58</sup> These comments suggest that a performer can reach a point of being so acceptant that his or her improvisatory actions almost look like the structure to the viewer.

Flexible actors improvise, not resorting to actions which are cliché, although improvisation may start with cliché as Herbert Blau argues:

[. . .] even when [the improvisational element is] practiced, improvisation almost invariably starts with cliché [. . .]. The purging of cliché is a function of repetition and duration, the breaking down of defenses through either sustained challenge or boredom. [. . .] Since most of us are complexes of habits, attitudes, and instincts which are banal until refined by the stringencies of thought and method, what can we really expect of unprepared and instantaneous responses but the shallowness of which we know ourselves capable. 59

Blau seems to regard improvisation itself as being not inevitably 'shallow' in quality but almost certainly so at its inception. If an improvisatory action can be tried and re-tried during rehearsals, it will have a chance of being 'refined' and consequently getting 'better', that is, something not 'banal'. Peter Brook also uses the word 'cliché' and focusses upon its limitation:

Those who work in improvisation have the chance to see with frightening clarity how rapidly the boundaries of so-called freedom are reached. Our exercises in public with the Theatre of Cruelty quickly led the actors to the point where they were nightly ringing variations on their own clichés [. . .]. 60

Improvisatory actions during rehearsals, or in Brook's case during exercises open to the public, have time and occasions to go through changes: the process of improvising directly contributes to the resultant structure of the production. In such cases, the performer and the person who directs the structuring are often different: 'Improvisations are chaotic; they need somebody to edit them, to impose order on them, to suggest ways of transforming the small bits of usable stuff into something whole.'<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, if an improvisatory action happens to be a once-only presentation for the audience, it cannot be re-tried but it will still blatantly reveal a performer's 'stringencies of thought and method', which have been cultivated by the performer outside the present performing moment. Johnstone's view on cliché focusses on what comes first to the performer, which uncovers his or her improvisatory gist:

Many students block their imaginations because they're afraid of being unoriginal. [. . .] The improviser has to realize that the more obvious he is, the more original he appears. [. . .] If someone says 'What's for supper?' a bad improviser will desperately try to think up something original. Whatever he says he'll be too slow. He'll finally drag up some idea like 'fried mermaid.' If he'd just said 'fish' the audience would have been delighted. 62

Here, apart from the importance of being quick in reaction, which, as has already been seen, is a pulse of improvisation, an apparently paradoxical idea is presented: an 'obvious' reaction



is a most fascinating execution of improvisation. This can be associated with Spolin's assertions: 'Everyone ad-libs every waking hour of the day and responds to the world through his senses. It is the enriching, restructuring, and integration of all of these daily life responses for use in the art form that makes up the training of the actor for scene improvisation and formal theater.'<sup>63</sup> Improvisation can also become a stepping-stone to another form of improvisation. Lee Strasberg explains, 'Even the technically trained actor, who has a battery of devices for impelling his imagination, often does not realize to how great an extent improvisation in performance can rest upon prior improvisation done during the rehearsal process.'<sup>64</sup>

If the audience do not realise that what they are seeing is a performer's improvisatory action, their appreciation of the action more likely concerns aesthetic elements, not the performer's accomplished skills in coping with the circumstances. Whether or not an improvisation really falls into the realm of aesthetics is another question, which I will briefly take up later. The point is, any improvisatory action needs the audience who are equipped with appropriate backgrounds and knowledge to take the presented improvisation as improvisation; otherwise, an improvisation would be transformed into something else once in the hands of the audience. Blau states in the following that all improvisatory actions are tightly-knit:

[T]he improvisational element is not merely random or associative. [. . .] for some academics worrying about the Text that they abuse in other ways, the word improvisation seems to signify everything reprehensible, even immoral, in alternative forms of theatre, an automatic sloppiness, or a loss of the

distinction between art and life. But, as in Barthes, one can imagine forms of theatre in which the single closure of interpretation is refused as reductive. The structure of proliferation is meant to be exact. The multiplicity is scored. 65

Our appreciation of an improvisatory action in fact occurs within an intricate as well as rule-governed complex of agreements, in which sense we are not at all a 'free' viewer of an action. It also means that people from different backgrounds may decode an improvisatory action in different ways. Can a performer and the audience share the 'moment' of improvisation without the background of solid tradition or knowledge? This question will be discussed in chapter 5.

Freedom and restriction are two strings that pull the whole idea of improvisation from opposite directions. Restriction relates to the form or the style of the theatre, an example of which is 'Happenings' as described by Michael Kirby. As far as Kirby is concerned, as we saw in chapter 3, 'Happenings' and improvisation are different: improvisation is rule-bound and only to be realised within the existent format of 'theatre', according to Kirby, whereas 'Happenings' may easily defy the very basis of what constitutes such an idea of 'improvisation':

In both Commedia dell'Arte and improvisational theatre, character, time and place are given: details within, and in terms of, the matrix are invented. Although Stanislavski's techniques are diverse enough to find use in ordinary nonmatrixed behavior, the actual application in countless acting classes and study groups is on the specific control of various aspects of personality and of imaginary time-place orientation. [. . .] [In Happenings], [i]f involved in a movement pattern, for example, [a performer] may get out of another's way or fall down if bumped by him, but he does not consciously adjust the qualities of his movement in order to fuse it visually with that of the other performers. The action in Happenings is often indeterminate but not improvised. 66



If we follow Kirby, an improvisatory action turns an accident during rehearsals or during the performance into something more usable. According to Kirby, the framework cannot change no matter what happens, since improvisation is a manifestation of an 'accurate and successful functioning within the traditional matrices' (p. 18). In Happenings, such matrices do not exist in the first place. Rather than coping with some critical circumstances so that the reaction will look most 'natural' and thus 'prearranged' both to the performers and the audience, the performers in Happenings are allowed, if they like, to halt the flow of the performance or even change the course of the flow. When we focus on a performance by a couple or a group of people 'in improvisational theatre and in jazz improvisation, one performer reacts to and adjusts his own work to that of another' (p. 18), whereas 'in Happenings, there is no momentary challenge. One performer reacts only functionally, and not esthetically or creatively, to the actions of another' (p. 18). A performer about to crash head on into another performer would try to avert the accident in a traditional improvisation not only because it would look like an unprofessional mistake to the audience but because it would probably disturb the framework of that particular theatre. Under the same circumstances a performer in Happenings could, as Kirby implies, actually crash into another performer and see what happens.

Improvisation always has to live with restrictions. Asked  
 67  
 how he 'combine[s] spontaneity and formal discipline',  
 Grotowski stresses the importance of 'forming a miniature score

for each part of the body' (p. 39) and continues:

[T]he more we become absorbed in what is hidden inside us, in the excess, in the exposure, in the self-penetration, the more rigid must be the external discipline; that is to say the form, the artificiality, the ideogram, the sign. Here lies the whole principle of expressiveness. (p. 39)

Unless the focus is sharp and well-disciplined in each movement of the body, a performer may not be able to 'express' what she wants to convey to the outside world. Grotowski also discusses the matter in a more general perspective when he refers to Artaud:

[I]n his description [Artaud] touches something essential, of which he is not quite aware. It is the true lesson of the sacred theatre; whether we speak of the medieval European drama, the Balinese, or the Indian Kathakali: this knowledge that spontaneity and discipline, far from weakening each other, mutually reinforce themselves; that what is elementary feeds what is constructed and vice versa, to become the real source of a kind of acting that glows. (p. 121)

Grotowski's remarks to some extent reiterate the importance of technique, which we looked at in chapter 2, and the idea that improvisation reveals the fundamental nature of performance, which we have discussed so far in this chapter. How performers regard their performance is another question. For example, what one sees as spontaneous aspects of a Balinese dance might not be taken as such by the dancers themselves. When Strasberg states that spontaneity has to be grasped consciously by the performer and thus to be under discipline, he is not discussing the Balinese theatre and other manifestations of a similar style:

In all great acting there is the element of spontaneity within a performance that yet keeps a shape and an outline. In great



acting there are constant improvisational elements that come through. The performance varies, but the outline remains the same.

Both the spontaneity and the outline have to be accomplished by the actor, as by any other craftsman, deliberately. [. . .] the thing that happens spontaneously in life must on the stage be created by the actor so that he knows he is creating it. It must be spontaneous and yet under the control of the actor. He must be aware and yet caught up in it. 68

Discipline also takes the form of external pressure or conditions which a performer cannot avoid. A most blatant example is a restriction coming from the condition of the performance space:

The things that do change are very delicate, very fine nuances of expression: something can be played more broadly, something more subtly. During the first performances we don't always know how things should be done. The actors try to put themselves in the place of the spectators. Because playing in a small, crowded club for 200 people is different than playing in a church for 1000 people scattered in a big empty space, you have to use different means. This is improvising with the means rather than with the core. The core remains constant while the actors adjust the means in order to reach the spectators. 69

Here again the matrix-oriented nature of improvisation is emphasised; the very fact that the core keeps firm and strong makes it possible for improvisatory actions to go through an incessant process of trial-and-error.

Improvisation may be regarded as a practical skill, which is useful in rehearsals and in performance and will 'enrich' the whole procession of theatre we are engaged in. If we foreground the technical aspects of improvisation strongly, we might define improvisation in quite straightforward terms: already being encased in a tradition of theatre, an improvising performer cannot be expected to flout the traditional lines or try to be stylistically 'new'; instead, his or her task is to demonstrate

the skill within that tradition. Accordingly, if a flouting occurs, it would no longer be an improvisatory action in the strict sense of the term, but it would be a newly-created genre, or style, of theatre. Such a definition seems to explain improvisation/non-improvisation of some of the most tradition-oriented theatres that we find. Because performance is always subject to time, it has to adjust to each 'moment', which may lead to the change of the very principles of discipline, restriction, or technique. Such a change may not always be detected easily from the outside or even be recognised by the performers themselves. Schechner touches upon the issue when discussing one of the most traditional of the traditional theatres, the Kathakali performance:

As basic work becomes second nature, subtleties emerge that reflect very precisely the personality of the performer. It is not as an American might think: creativity has not been stifled by all the apparently mechanical training. Rather, when the time comes for individuality to be expressed it emerges from a wholly mastered technique that no longer feels 'technical' either to the performer or to the audience. Masters contribute from themselves -- even if they are not always conscious that they are doing so. From their point of view, they are doing what they know how to do, pouring themselves into the vessels of their scores. But these vessels are not stone-hard, they are surprisingly malleable, not only during the times of allowed improvisation but, even in the details of the scores themselves. 70

In the case of a performance by a 'master', improvisation can totally be absorbed in the performer's confidence: the performer believes that he or she is merely a follower of an 'authentic' way of performing. According to Schechner, such confidence is actually wrong. In the hands of a 'master', an 'authenticity' subjects itself to a change, which means that improvisatory



actions have a power to push the history of authenticity forward. In such cases, improvisation is a technique but can be an incentive for the reshaping of a tradition, too. Schechner's argument seems to draw on the notion of 'orality' as opposed to 'literacy', which William Frawley defines as follows: '"Orality" is a descriptive term for strategies which individuals use to gain or organize knowledge from a non-textual standpoint.

"Literacy" is a descriptive term for strategies which individuals bring to bear to gain or organize textual knowledge.'<sup>71</sup> 'Textual knowledge' here refers to a rather traditional meaning of the term, that gained by 'reading, writing, and arithmetic' (p. 40). Granted that Frawley himself does not put 'orality' against 'literacy' (p. 39) and that traditional theatres do have texts in one form or another, we will, for the sake of the argument, put the kind of traditional theatre that Schechner takes up in the 'orality' group, mainly because of the presence of a human 'master' as an 'authority', who can override a written 'text' if he or she wants to. Frawley's argument on 'orality' may then be followed in accordance with Schechner's argument:

Because language and knowledge under oral circumstances are developed experientially in face-to-face interaction, there is a tendency [. . .] to maintain internal stability and to regulate the flow and development of knowledge all for the purpose of the reiteration of the status quo. This does not mean that non-textuality rules out the acquisition of new knowledge; quite the contrary: new knowledge is introduced, but only at the expense of existing knowledge. Thus, culture as a system of knowledge in non-textuality is closed, or, at least, tends toward stability. [. . .] The point here is that non-textuality involves knowledge as something which is noncumulative and not stored. Knowledge is fluid; epistemologies are adapted. This homeostasis -- the system stabilizing itself -- requires no need to accumulate knowledge because knowledge is not something which is built up over time, but a self-adjusting aggregate. (Frawley, pp. 42-43)

A 'master', however inadvertently, can change what people thought was the canon of their theatre. The new codes introduced by the change have little difficulty in becoming part of the 'stable' whole, because a face-to-face interaction of the performer and the other participants makes it easy for the performer to let the people know the 'meaning' of the new codes on the spot. This is possible because, Frawley argues, a homeostatic world implies a world where we find 'a sense of cultural unity' (p. 56), which means:

[U]nder conditions of non-textuality, the individuals and the culture are not distinct. [...] dream interpretation in non-textuality often takes the form of individuals consulting the person who knows the standard dream interpretations in a culture for the 'correct' reading of the dream. Such activity, furthermore, is most often done in the presence of many members of the culture. What results is an interpretation of, and solution to, a new problem by means of resorting to one source of information in the context of the totality of the culture. [...] All problems in non-textuality are, in a sense, already solved since new information is either excluded or immediately incorporated into the system of knowledge in existence. (p. 57)

In other words, what the 'master' does becomes at once a newly moulded theatrical canon for all the people from the same culture or the cognoscenti. We might even say that an improvisatory action in such cases would cease to be 'improvisatory' the moment it is performed.

Actually, applying 'orality' or 'literacy' to various styles of theatre would not be as simple as we might think especially because in doing so we would have to take into consideration the type of audience, the condition of the performance, and many other factors. For example, the 'core' can also change in non-traditional theatres, which lack one absolute 'master' and



cultural closeness. In this case, a process would be more heuristic and thus more plainly experimental, which may or may not result in a stability. Lech Raczak explains from a director's point of view:

Most of each piece remains constant from performance to performance, although sometimes sections are improvised anew each night. Of course, only to some extent; there are limits to improvisation. Besides, you can improvise only during the first 20 or 30 performances. Later everything becomes more or less fixed. That means we take the best improvisations and convert them into fixed elements. A scene may look improvised in performance when in fact it no longer is. 72

An improvisatory action is tried and re-tried, refined and modified, and it may gradually develop into a fixed form, at which point it becomes a new element in the 'core'. This is to say that the 'core' has changed its shape, if not totally transformed.

Coming back to the question of aesthetics and improvisation, we might assert that improvisatory actions take part in building a theatrical piece but are not 'art' themselves. Improvisation never exists for its own sake; it always functions so that the core, or the principle, of the piece will be facilitated 'better'. As Paul Thom states, 'the nature and the value of improvisations' are not to 'be reduced to the nature and value of works of art', since '[t]he ability to improvise is a different ability from the ability to compose, even though they are related'.<sup>73</sup> Whatever shape it may take, the core would have to be 'art' if the whole work will be called a 'work of art'.

Otherwise, an improvisatory action in our daily lives would have a chance of being called 'art', which is not the case; Bach's

organ piece may leave many of its notes open for the organist's improvisatory contribution, and yet the crucial notes or chords remain Bach's; a film made up of improvisatory scenes is a work of art if its entire sequence as a whole can be regarded as 'art'. Susanne K. Langer clarifies this point:

[. . .] pure show, not assimilated to any art, does not constitute a 'work'. Acrobatics, tennis playing, some beautiful occupational rhythms such as hauling nets, swinging hammers, or the evolutions of boats in a race, are fascinating, aesthetically thrilling, so they hold the spectator in a joyful trance; but they are not art. For a work of art, this trance is only one requisite. Spectacle, however beautiful, is always an element in art. It may well be a major element, as it was in Noverre's ballets, and in the court masques, but even these largely spectacular products are rated as 'works' because they had something else that motivated the display: an imaginative core, a 'commanding form'. A circus could be a work of art if it had some central feeling and some primary, unfailing illusion. As it is, the circus sometimes contains genuine little 'works' -- a riding act that is really an equestrian dance, a piece of clowning that rises to genuine comedy. But on the whole the circus is a 'show', not a work of art, though it is a work of skill, planning and fitting, and sometimes copes with problems that arise also in the arts. What it lacks is the first requisite for art -- a conception of feeling, something to express. 74

Since it is not our present concern to examine what in fact constitutes 'art', we will not discuss the 'core' of theatre/performance here; we simply make an agreement that a certain piece is a work of art and start looking at improvisation from there. Thom calls improvisation a 'routine':

The routines [. . .] will be works for performance only if they can be recovered in the form of directives for performance. If they are not so recoverable, then the improvisation is a performance of a routine but not the performance of any work. (p. 69)

Here, the 'recoverability' offers a line which divides 'art' from



non-art. Thom's suspicion towards making 'art' out of improvisation clearly shows when he refers to a wholly improvised performance. A certain 'complexity', one of the requisites for 'art' according to Thom, cannot be hoped for in a wholly improvised performance:

If the author's work is removed from the structure of performance but the performers themselves do not become authors, so that genuinely there is no work performed, then the whole performance must be improvised. In these circumstances it is difficult to imagine that anything having the complexity of an interpreted work of art could be conceived and executed sur le champs. At any rate, it seems clear that performers who had been trained as executants would be most unlikely, in performing without works, to produce an aesthetic object comparable in value to what can be produced in the performance of a work. The most likely outcome in such circumstances is that the performers would be reduced, in one way or another, to exhibiting themselves and their physical capacities, like circus performers. (p. 71)

Thom's argument once again brings us back to Blau's 'shallow' improvisation, an action which is deprived of 'memories', of our refining the idea and the technique. Granted that any improvisation might end up in 'a loose gestalt and a sterile formalism; at worst, parody, paranoia, and melodrama, illusion's revenge upon itself', <sup>75</sup> what we must aim at in order to avoid the 'shallowness' is 'performance improvisation', not mere 'improvisation'.

## 5. Performer-Audience Relationship in Space and Time

### 5.1 Gap

Throughout chapters 1, 2, 3, and 4, performance improvisation was discussed in the context of the 'moment'. A performer makes some kind of performative decision in this 'moment'. In the *commedia dell'arte*, such decision-making seems to be influenced by the presence of the well-informed audience. The *Commedia* performers and their audience share the background knowledge, tradition, and conventions, which to a considerable extent determine the criteria for 'successful' improvisation. The performers aim at the target, namely, the audience's expectations, which is possible because both the performers and the audience know what 'improvisation' in *Commedia* is. The 'encounter' of the *Commedia* performers and their audience is thus fierce and demanding on either side: performers' skill ideally will improve because of the refined audience's eye, which means that the audience are as much responsible as the performers for keeping up the standards and quality of the *Commedia* performance. When we dealt with technique in chapter 2, we saw that a performer's improvisatory decision-making has to be 'clear'. In the *commedia dell'arte*, such clarity is important in a twofold sense. First, clarity is vital among performers who build their technique on the continual process of decision-making and who also have to rely on various cues and signs given by their co-performers. Second, the audience, however experienced they may be, still demand a performance with improvisatory technique which is 'clear' enough for them to judge and appreciate on the spot. Our discussion in chapter 2 mainly referred to the technical clarity concerning



performers themselves. Whether or not any technical clarity exists between the performers and the audience seems to depend on the performance style or genre. Whereas the *commedia dell'arte* seems to have such 'clarity', an ambivalent relationship between the performer and the audience is especially evident in a performance which is not based on a fixed performer-audience agreement. To call some action an 'improvisatory' action without a performer-audience agreement is a one-sided view. Although this particular problem of gap was touched upon briefly in chapters 3 and 4, we did not pursue it very far. Here in this chapter, we discuss the performance-audience relationship in the 'moment' of performance. The question, how a gap between a performer and the audience is produced in a space-time dimension, will bring us to the problem of that very gap affecting our attempt to define 'performance improvisation'. Since the performer-audience relationship directly involves the idea and the practice of the audience interpreting a performer, we will also review a semiotic study of theatrical interpretation in this chapter. We will conclude at the end of the chapter that 'performance improvisation' is basically a performer's domain rather than the audience's.

## 5.2 What the Audience Sense

Richard Schechner uses the word 'experience' when he draws our attention to 'the feelings or moods of those participating as players, directors, spectators, and observers'<sup>1</sup>. Schechner uses the word 'frame (or net)' when asking 'how do players, directors, spectators, and observers know when a play act begins, is taking

place, and is over?' (p. 25).<sup>2</sup> Both the performers and the audience 'experience' the 'moment' of performance and they respectively have some kind of 'frame' when participating in that performance. 'Frame' relates to what Langer calls 'form' in chapter 3. In an interview with John Cage, Schechner asks Cage about the change of 'structure' in a performance. In Cage's answer we find that 'structuring' is a process initiated by any member of the audience, who is put in the position of interpreting a performance:

The structure we should think about is that of each person in the audience. In other words, his consciousness is structuring the experience differently from anybody else's in the audience. So the less we structure the theatrical occasion and the more it is like unstructured daily life, the greater will be the stimulus to the structuring faculty of each person in the audience.<sup>3</sup>

'Experience' and 'frame', or 'structure', will be taken differently by different individuals. Accordingly, the space and the time in those 'experience' and 'frame' are shared by the audience and the performer but interpreted differently. Time and space then acquire the meaning of a 'sense' of space and a 'sense' of time felt by individual participants. In Schechner's definition of what he calls an 'actual', he refers to the 'consequential[ity]', 'irremediab[ility]', and 'irrevocab[ility]' of an 'actual',<sup>4</sup> which especially seem applicable to the concept of improvisation. Irrevocable space and time in the first place are the laws of nature and thus existent with or without the participants. To sense space or to sense time means that participants are consciously, or subconsciously, recognising its irrevocability. Schechner writes that such recognition occurs in



'the new theatre' when it 'allow[s] the event to flow freely through space and [. . .] design[s] whole spaces entirely for specific performances' (p. 29).

The audience live in the space and the time which a performer can influence but cannot always control. For example, Elaine Aston and George Savona point out that there are times when 'breaks' indicated in various ways during a performance may not be recognised by a 'spectator', who remains 'unaware of the units of text' and instead 'experiences continuity'.<sup>5</sup> This implies that the audience tend to 'experience' the performance more in line with the time-span of their own perception than with the time-slot devised by the performer. A member of the audience 'experiences' performance space and performance time by exercising her visual and auditory senses, or occasionally her other senses, which will culminate in the overall 'sense' of being at the scene of that performance. Her 'experience' is bound to be extremely subjective and idiosyncratic. As we have already seen, each member of the audience reacts to the village pageant in Woolf's Between the Acts through his or her own 'net'; for some of the audience, the present pageant performance is mixed with their personal histories to such an extent that their sense of 'continuity' lets them re-experience the past while experiencing the present. Gertrude Stein uses the word 'nervous' to describe the audience being either consciously or subconsciously aware of their own frame of time and space not matching the space and the time set up by the performers:

[. . .] that the thing seen and the thing felt about the thing

seen not going on at the same tempo is what makes the being at the theatre something that makes anybody nervous.

The jazz bands made of this thing, the thing that makes you nervous at the theatre, they made of this thing an end in itself. They made of this different tempo a something that was nothing but a difference in tempo between anybody and everybody including all those doing it and all those hearing and seeing it. In the theatre of course this difference in tempo is less violent but still it is there and it does make anybody nervous. 6

On the one hand, performers can intentionally try to extract a sense of strong 'continuity' or a 'nervous' reaction from the audience. Aston and Savona list four 'temporal planes', which are 'time present', 'chronological time', 'plot time', and 'performance time' (p. 27; p. 29). They explain that '[i]n a performance context, the spectator's awareness of these temporal planes in relation to the dramatic action may be signified by the development of systems of staging in both time and space' (p. 30). We may enlarge the argument to include actions that are not strictly 'dramatic' in Aston and Savona's sense: depending on how both time and space are 'developed', arranged, and presented, the audience's 'awareness' of time and place may change from a virtual non-awareness to an acute awareness. As Susan Sontag points out, awareness can be prompted through a performance which emphasises some 'trivial' or 'unimportant' aspects of the 'experience':

[. . .] in principle, one should desire to pay attention to everything. It's this view, most elegantly formulated by Cage though its practice is found everywhere, that leads to the art of the inventory, the catalogue, surfaces; also 'chance'. The function of art isn't to sanction any specific experience, except the state of being open to the multiplicity of experience -- which ends in practice by a decided stress on things usually considered trivial or unimportant. 7

On the other hand, an attempt on the part of the performer does



not guarantee a particular reaction on the part of the audience. Whether or not such a reaction is needed or sought for depends on the performance.

Apart from some exceptional cases such as the *commedia dell'arte*, it seems that performers using improvisation do not necessarily expect the audience to detect 'improvisation' as 'improvisation'. The performers use improvisation for the sake of their performance, not for the sake of 'improvisation' itself. As long as 'improvisation' proves to be effective from their point of view, the performers may not even care if the audience take some 'improvisatory' action as a tightly-choreographed action or as any other kind of action. The concept of improvisation, then, is strongly performer-centred. This is detected when we read of Augusto Boal and his group's performances on a Paris metro or on a boat in Sweden. They used 'choreography' and 'improvisation', involving the 'audience' in quite an aggressive manner: the majority of the members of the alleged 'audience' did not even know that they were part of a 'performance'.<sup>8</sup> To those who did not know, Boal and his group's performances were natural incidents. What the group might call an excitingly lively 'audience' participation may then be a manipulation of the 'audience' by 'original' performers. The alleged 'audience' might not even realise that they are being manipulated; rather, as Boal himself explains, they would find Boal and his group's performances quite 'convincing':

[. . .] every idea, however abstract, can be theatrical to the

extent that it manifests itself in a concrete form in particular circumstances in terms of will. From which the following relationship can be formulated: idea=will=emotion=theatrical form; in other words, the abstract idea when transformed into a concrete will in particular circumstances will give rise in the actor to the emotion which will spontaneously find a theatrical form which is adequate, valid and convincing for the spectator. Problems of style and other questions come afterwards. (p. 54)

The 'will' of the performers does not always result in the audience recognising that 'will', not to mention the performers' improvisatory actions.

Paul Thom explains the agreement/non-agreement between the performer and the audience by putting performance in two categories, the artistic performance and the nonartistic performance:

In the case of true performances, there is an implicit social agreement that the performance will be given at a particular time and place and that both performers and audience will behave by mutual consent in more-or-less expected ways. None of this applies to as-if performances [nonartistic performances]. We, their unwilling audience, do not know when or where to expect them and have no agreed expectations regarding their decorum. What we find most displeasing about them is that, contrary to the facts, we are treated as if we had made an agreement on their conduct. If such an agreement were made on a particular occasion, then the as-if performance would become a true performance (and probably a pretty bad one). 9

If we follow Thom's argument, the sense of 'moment' is evoked both in the performer and in the audience only when the performance is a 'true' one, that is, an 'artistic' one. In an 'as-if' performance, an advantage enjoyed by the performer results in the creation of 'unwilling' audiences. On the other hand, Thom adds that an as-if performance with an agreement 'on a particular occasion' can 'become' a 'true' performance. This in turn suggests that, however 'bad' it may be, a performance which



makes at least some kind of agreement between the performer and the audience will justify its 'true' status. The 'moment' of establishing a performer-audience agreement, however brief it may be or however inexplicable it may be, can possibly be a 'moment' when the audience most acutely feel performance time and performance space. Robert Ayers' introduction to 'live art' seems relevant here:

[. . .] live art allows the artist to enter into the everyday lives of its audience and -- quite literally -- to touch them. And it is that moment free of preconceptions when flesh touches flesh, which as often as not is as unsettling -- let's face it, as terrifying -- for the artist as for the audience that, no matter what else they build upon it, is the essence of live art for many of the artists who make it. 10

Improvisation can then be used in an 'as-if' performance to produce a flash of performer-audience agreement on the performance time and the performance space, and this is the reverse of the traditional improvisation which requires an already well-established performer-audience agreement. The problem is, there always remains a possibility that people might interpret improvisatory actions in an 'as-if' circumstance as everyday-actions of a 'mad' or 'insane' person rather than a call for making a 'true' performance. Richard Layzell explains: 'My experience of this kind of audience [the casual passer-by in a street performance] is that they don't usually stay for long, unless you find a way of stopping them or involving, enthralling or scandalising them. [. . .] A performance artist on the street is likely to elicit the same kind of response as a 'freak' of some kind to be avoided'.<sup>11</sup>

A performer makes certain that the audience somehow 'sense'

the space and the time of a performance. Improvisation may be a useful 'tool' to achieve that aim, as we will see in the following sections. The audience do not need to recognise the 'tool' when they recognise its effect.

### 5.3 Presence and Reality in Space and Time

Patrice Pavis groups together Peter Handke, Michel Vinaver, Samuel Beckett, and Heiner Müller as playwrights by pointing out that their works 'no longer attempt to imitate speakers in the act of communicating, nor [. . .] lock themselves into indecipherable words'.<sup>12</sup> When 'text [. . .] can no longer be recapitulated or resolved or lead to action', states Pavis, it 'addresses itself as a whole to the audience, like a global poem tossed in the hearers' laps to be taken or left as they please' (p. 57). The audience do not necessarily catch every detail of such 'wholeness' nor do they always put the 'whole' in perspective. From what Pavis describes, we can assume that the works by those people cited above produce in performance an 'atmosphere' which operates in space and time, which is at the same time general and particular, and which can be seen or interpreted from any angle.

The 'presence' of the audience in space and time may take various forms. Evoking the awareness of the 'moment' looks easy when the 'presence' actually refers to the bodily presence of the audience receiving a 'whole' performance. The fact is, even the audience who are potentially in the position of closely watching and hearing what goes on in the performance might not become sensitive towards the performance 'moment' until some aspects of



the performance shake them from their apathetic reactions. Being 'present' in a performance enables the audience to experience an 'encounter' in a most direct and pure manner. At the same time, being 'present' in a performance is such a usual and common way of participating in the performance that the simple fact of 'presence' may not in itself be enough to arouse the audience's sensitivity towards the performance time and the performance space. How does a performer's action, and especially her improvisatory action, arouse the sensitivity towards space and time within the audience who are in close proximity of this performer and thus capable of absorbing the performer's action in detail if they so desire? A performer can emphasise her own vulnerability to time and space, her own 'presence' in front of the audience, by which she may be able to prompt the 'sense' of time and place, of 'presence', in the audience. Both the audience and the performer 'sense' their special moment of performance through the 'presence' of one another. As a person who has planned a performance and has invited the audience to it, a performer is responsible for initiating such an 'encounter' successfully.

Highlighting the 'reality' of the 'moment' may be one way of leading the audience to focus on their 'presence'. 'Reality' here refers to, for example, our feeling towards someone as a living human performer, who may even die right in front of our eyes. When the audience strongly feel the 'real' nature of the performer, that 'reality' instantly reflects on the audience's own presence in that 'real' moment. When, for example, the

audience are made to be acutely aware of a performer inflicting some real pain on her body during a performance, that awareness is likely to transcend any ideology, explanations, or rationality which otherwise may occupy the audience's attention. The audience at such a 'moment' of witnessing real pain may possibly only feel the 'reality' of what is going on, even though they know that it is a 'performance' and it is not likely that a performer actually hurts herself seriously in a performance. A similar reaction can be expected from the audience in a situation involving a performer's action which seems highly dangerous to the audience but which in fact is quite safe.<sup>13</sup> In either case, the audience tend to regard the performer as a living human being rather than as a performer, and they just as strongly regard themselves as living human beings. Nevertheless, we have to remember that 'performance improvisation' is not about any life-threatening action by a performer but is a way of revealing, in a concrete manner, the fundamental nature of what we regard as 'performance'. 'Reality' has less to do with how a performer or a member of the audience lives with some physical danger than with how the participants mix the performance 'frame' with their living, human nature. Susan Melrose describes 'real' in theatre:

[T]heatre's role is no longer to represent effectively a 'real out there', but rather to present a vitally forceful 'real in here', whose status as 'real' derives precisely from its investiture of concentrated and mastered human energies. These are forged by the conditions of live performance itself, and hover constantly [. . .] on the borderline between a closely-watched strength and fragility. It is this combination of controlled energies, caught in the real event of their precarious production, which makes theatre so dangerously pleasing to some of us. 14



Theatre, according to Melrose, is 'real' for its participants only when 'human energies' are fully activated, energies which are firm and yet vulnerable, immediate, and concrete for its participants.

Granted that energies will be, in one way or another, continuously generated and spent as long as the performance lasts, they cannot possibly keep up the same amount and quality of force throughout the performance. There have to be fluctuations of energies, which will produce moments of very tense reality and also those of rather relaxed reality.

'Reality' can also be a relative term, which Blau sums up: 'What we take to be real, to be sure, is often in contrast to something we consider less real. The frame can shift, and what was unreal can suddenly seem real, with the shock of recognition or a more or less fine suddenness'.<sup>15</sup> Blau attributes such 'shifting' to our 'vulnerab[ility] to time' (p. 99); this 'vulnerability' enables the audience to experience each 'moment' of a performance unpredictably.

From what we have looked at so far in this section, 'reality' and improvisation, or 'presence' and improvisation, seem to go hand in hand only when we consider such performances as the *commedia dell'arte*. In other circumstances without a firm rule or agreement between the performers and the audience, we may expect to find 'reality' highlighted by improvisation only on the performers' side. As we discussed in chapter 2, a performer's decision-making involves her whole physical and mental capacities, whether inherently-given or acquired by training, and this is nothing but one of the most tense moments of 'reality' as

far as the performer is concerned. 'Reality' for the audience, on the other hand, may or may not overlap the moment of a performer's improvisation.

We should note that there are some performances which deliberately mix the off-performance reality with the performance-reality, showing us that off-performance/performance differences are not clear to a human being in the first place. Stanton B. Garner Jr cites one of the performances by Joseph Chaikin which, from Garner's phenomenological point of view, manifests a human body's vulnerability as well as its unavoidable presence at the centre of reality. Struck Dumb was a play in which Chaikin, who was recovering from aphasia, said his lines 'with concentration and difficulty, occasionally stumbling over words [. . .]', in other words, with his physical condition presented as it was.<sup>16</sup> We note here that Struck Dumb did not set out to emphasise Chaikin's disrupted speech. It was enough for Chaikin to present himself and try to talk. As Garner explains, the play had an intricately planned structure, whose very theatricality and formality ended up foregrounding Chaikin's 'real' presence:

In its urgent concern with delivery and its obstacles, Chaikin's play highlighted the interaction of textuality and utterance, the uniquely theatrical moment when writing stumbles, as it were, on the phenomenon of speech. Though he performed Struck Dumb in a 'textualized' performance space -- his lines literally written in front of him and throughout the stage and auditorium -- Chaikin seized this text, physicalized its words in moments of delivery whose corporeality was powerfully evident in the strains of bearing and enunciation. (p. 122)

To use Blau's words, Struck Dumb 'shifted' the definition of



performance from being exclusive of the off-performance 'reality' to being complementary to, or even inclusive of, the off-performance reality. Sidney Homan asserts that reality in performance and reality off performance verify each other:

[W]hat distinguishes the theater from real life is that the former is always conscious, the latter most often unconscious of its fakery, of its role playing; and, thus, the more the theater underscores its artifice, the more true or real it becomes. Far from distancing the audience, the play's metadramatic dimension only reminds us of the common reality to which those off- and onstage, contribute during the production. 17

If improvisation can be part of the 'artifice' being 'underscored', that is, if improvisation can help the audience experience the 'reality' of performance, it also means that improvisation is helping the audience experience the 'common reality'. As briefly stated before, whether or not the audience connect 'common experience' to 'improvisation' is another question.

#### 5.4 Perception in Space and Time

The most traditional means of transmitting the performer's intention to the audience are visual and auditory ones, though we cannot ignore some other possible means. Marco De Marinis marks out some alternative means of communication in performance:

[W]e find examples of texts that are [. . .] doubly heterogeneous -- and also involving more than one avenue of sensory transmission -- in sound cinema and television broadcasting, in addition to, above all, theatrical performance. The performance text is thus multi-coded, which is to say heterogeneous, in its codes, multimedia (or 'composite'), and also multidimensional, since it involves more than one channel of perception: in all cases, at least two (the acoustic and the visual), sometimes three (the acoustic, the visual, and the tactile, as in performances that involve the active participation of the audience), more rarely four or five, as in the 'happenings' of

the 1960s, or more recently, in performance art, where smell and taste are sometimes activated. 18

How these channels of perception function will vary according to individual participants' alertness, concentration, interest, or lack of any of those factors. Architectural settings and other environmental factors would also affect the depth of perception.

For example, if some soup is brought onto the stage during a performance and its smell is detected by the audience, the fact of their actually smelling the soup and recognising that the soup is real does not have the same meaning as when we smell some soup outside performance. The audience are accepting the performer's deliberate intention to let them smell the soup and to make them realise that a sense of smell, which is not a traditional channel of sense in performance, has now been used. Ordinary connotations of smell, soup, meal, and eating do not apply in this circumstance, although they are never rejected completely. The smell of the soup in this case functions primarily to help the audience recognise the performance space and the performance time by means of an unusual channel of perception. Having real soup during the performance also gives the 'moment' to the performer herself, simply because she is reacting to the real soup at this particular time in this particular space instead of having fake soup and pretending that it is real soup.

'Perception' may also involve a bodily encounter between a performer and a member of the audience, for example, the performers and the audience physically touching one another, which was characteristically popular in the 1960s. A very 'real', tactile sense elicited has the purpose of letting the



audience feel for themselves that they are 'concretely' experiencing a performance.

Improvised or not, a performer's action conveyed to the audience through whatever channels of perception has to be controlled so that the purpose of stimulating such perceptual aspects of the participants will not be lost. 'Perception' may be useful in emphasising the 'reality' of a performance, but there also is the possibility of our definition of 'performance' being confused because of a strong, 'concrete', perceptual sense. If a performance 'frame' is clear for the audience who are witnessing or experiencing some kind of strongly perceptual 'encounter', it means that the audience are at the same time aware, consciously or subconsciously, of the performer's intentions in using those particular channels of perception. This is to say that the audience in a certain performance 'frame' know that they are being 'fooled' by the performer. In John Harrop's words on the audience observing the 'skill' of the performer:

Once a person is aware of the skills that are operating on the stage, a performance may be watched with what might be termed a bifocalism. This is the audience equivalent of what we have termed the actor's controlled schizophrenic or doubleness. Not by a conscious suspension of belief, but by an awareness of how an effect is being made, an audience member can both experience and appreciate the effect at the same time. Possibly some marginal experience of the emotional moment is lost by the intellectual withholding of some empathy, but this is at least compensated for by the extra experience of the conscious art of the moment and the appreciation of the actor's skill. 19

If a tactile encounter between a performer and the audience becomes the primary and the only 'meaning' of that performance,

the audience's physical as well as emotional involvement will be quite 'pure', which will hardly leave room for any 'bifocal' interpretation of the performance.<sup>20</sup> In such performances, the question of how to define 'performance' may even cease to be an issue.

Controlling our perception is easier said than done; sometimes our perception seems to overwhelm our intellectual knowledge or the framework we set up for a performance. 'Real' perception at times proves so convincing that it momentarily occupies our whole attention and becomes the experience itself. From what Melrose explains in the following, which is about a production of Electra, we may infer that there are performances which take advantage of the performers' capacity for prompting some 'real' perception in the audience. In such performances, the audience are led to make a 'drama' out of some strongly 'concrete' perception rather than out of their intelligent interpretation of the 'coded' function of the performers who act out the text:

What is striking in the work [Deborah] Warner and [Fiona] Shaw produce [. . .] is the extent to which the dramas I could play out were instigated by an intensity of body-work, within which the dramatic writing resonated first as voice, second as means to 'organise' fields of force. When I combine the somatic-discursive practice with those other dramas it can activate in the spectator, it begins to become clear that what we are dealing with in dramatic theatre [. . .] is [. . .] working like a somatography [. . .]. Such a somatography is far from 'already given' [. . .]. It emerges in the intersection between production and spectator-experience of performance, not just in that it involves a multifaceted body graphy [sic] (with no 'depth' necessary) worked on the active stage, but because it elicits in the singular practice of each spectator a voyage of the eye resistant to authorial control. 21

In this case, the 'body-work' of the performer is so 'intense'



that the audience cannot be confined to traditional modes of interpretation such as a coding-decoding relationship between what the performer does and how the audience take that performance. We will look at the 'codes' further in the following section. Here, each intense 'body-work' momentarily attracts the audience's perception so overwhelmingly that the audience can only perceive each 'body-work' somatically. Any 'intellectual' interpretation of the 'body-work' will come after each somatic experience. Shaw's 'body-work' is so highly intense that the information which her 'body-work' gives to the audience will be too complex for them to decipher quickly and easily. In other words, a perceptual activity itself is 'real', an activity which is not predictable, or not determined until we observe the actual body-work.

Since a detailed study of the functions and the mechanism of human perceptions would involve the knowledge of physiology, of neurology, of psychology, among others, which cannot be carried out in the present discussion, all we attempt here is to think about human perception in space and time from a performer's and the audience's points of view. Humanistic analyses and anecdotes of perception written or told by performers or the audience or the critics are particularly problematic on the issue of an extremely 'concrete' experience, simply because such an experience is difficult to explain. We saw in chapter 4 that the participants in a 'trance' situation will be able to realise what they have experienced in 'trance' only after they actually regain themselves. Melrose's 'voyage of the eye' does not refer to a

'trance', but what she describes can be taken as a momentary near-trance situation as far as the audience are concerned. As we discussed in chapter 2, exactly how a very 'concrete', trance-like perception is experienced cannot be discerned easily, partly because a 'trance' situation is only revealed to those who are right in the middle of experiencing a 'trance'. Once they are out of trance, that is, once they come back to the state which allows them to interpret that experience, those people are only able to see the 'trance' from the outside. What they remember about the 'trance' is actually part of their post-experience interpretation. If they were truly in trance, their concentration on their experience would be too pure and heightened to leave room for thinking about it. In this vein, the very notion of 'performance improvisation' and that of 'trance', or near-'trance', are not compatible. A highly active and intense perceptual sense is always placed within some kind of 'frame' if such a perception enables us to 'sense' the 'moment' of a performance. The audience who have been in a near-trance situation find themselves in the position to be able to interpret a performance only when they are out of trance, when they can reassemble the performance parts in perspective either consciously or subconsciously.

### 5.5 Signifier, Signified, and Referent in Space and Time

Given that the audience need to go through some kind of interpretative action in 'sensing' the 'moment' of a performance, our next question will be: How exactly do the audience interpret? The question re-invokes a gap between the performer and the



audience. If, as we have discussed so far in this chapter, the gap is an inevitable outcome of the performers and the audience not agreeing on rules or conventions among other factors, we might state further that it is the performers who first 'violate' the conventions, not the audience. This does not mean that any 'violation' has to be 'sensed' by the performers themselves before it will ever have a chance of being 'sensed' by the audience. Whether or not the performers are conscious of 'violating' some rules and conventions, or are deliberately 'violating' them, does not matter to the audience so long as the audience on their part are able to judge, consciously or subconsciously, the nature and the degree of the violation. The audience in the process of interpreting such a violation are negotiating with all their senses, experience, expectations, prior knowledge, and intelligence so that they can decide for themselves how to tackle that violation. The audience's chain of reactions as they evaluate a 'violation' may possibly include what Blau calls 'credibility':

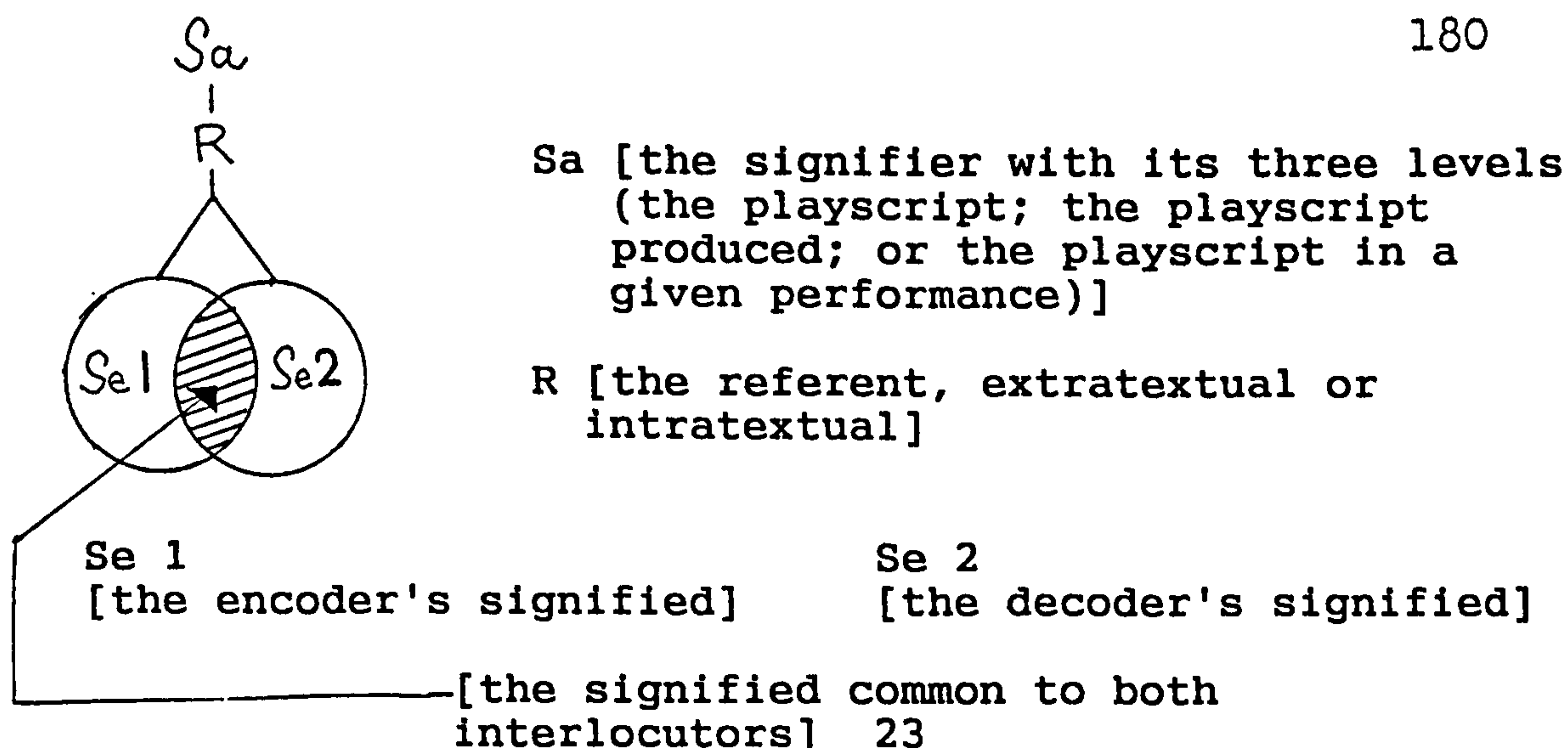
Credibility is the measure of displacement or disfigurement. [. . .] The theatrical enigma is analogous to the structure of metaphor, where one thing is also being referred to another. [. . .] but whether we 'believe' it or not, it is really not the metaphor but the nature of belief which is at stake. [. . .] The old conventions -- which is to say, habits of belief -- can contain only so much new, and hence devaluing, content. The disfigurement itself is an irruption of new content. It is also a breach of form trying to erase the difference between form and content. In performance, there is a contradiction at the groin: between the requirements of the form, conventionally remembered, and the insistent, irredeemably human violation -- which is always disfiguring, because subject to time. Credibility defines the space in which the contradiction is not absent but no longer felt. That, too, is subject to time. 22

For the audience to accept 'contradiction', they first have to

accept the fact that the actual performance is undeniably happening within the space and the time in which the audience find themselves; whether or not the audience smoothly digest its structure, form, or content, they must know that what is happening in front of their eyes is actually a performance. Secondly, the audience have to be aware of the fact that they are automatically pressured by time limitations. Time does not wait for the audience to take their time in interpreting the performance, although it does not necessarily mean that the audience are always pushed to judge and interpret the instant they experience the performance. They will simply have to give up a perfectionist's attitude and give up trying to 'understand' every single detail of the performance. Otherwise, the audience would lose track of the performance procedure or would find the pressure of time unbearable for them. These two conditions understood, the audience are free to see and decide for themselves how and to what extent 'violations' of conventions occur in the performance.

Michael Issacharoff's schematic signifier-signified-referent triad clearly shows that what we usually call 'signified' should actually be considered from the 'encoder''s point of view on the one hand and from the 'decoder''s point of view on the other:





The audience, in this case mainly the 'decoder', have an independent 'signified' which, as the scheme above indicates, has only a portion of common elements with the encoder's signified. As Elaine Aston and George Savona state, we 'have no way of knowing whether they are truly meant'<sup>24</sup> when we try to 'read' (p. 99) into the dress worn by a person. Issacharoff, who states that 'the signified and referent are not interchangeable, although they are often confused' (p. 59), seems to imply here that the same 'referent' can elicit a variety of reactions from the audience. Each of the reactions, we assume, will become a 'concrete' experience for the respective members of the audience. Here, we are again reminded of what Susan Melrose states:

As spectator I cannot fully know, through the objectifying senses, what the actor knows through feeling and doing, nor what has gone into that feeling and doing in the space between writing and performance -- so that the conventional 'page to stage' formula which hints at understanding on the part of the analyst needs to be questioned. What follows from that assertion is this: as spectator I lack the means to analyse a number of real causal factors [. . .], which in a given instance have transformed writing into performance. 25

The encoder may try to bring the decoder's attention to certain elements of the performance; she organises the 'referents' in

such a way that their 'signifieds' will be well-focussed ones for the decoder, the ones which the encoder intended. Still, the decoder can follow where her natural, instinctive perceptions direct and reach her own decision on her 'signified'. Alexander Alland Jr explains the inevitable gap between the encoder and the decoder in a performance experience:

When an audience observes or listens to an artistic product it enters with the artist into one kind of communication game. This is the essence of the social aspect of art. The funny thing about art, however, is that it can 'get away' from its creator. Once a piece of art is finished and enters the public domain, its interpretation becomes variable, depending upon the cultural and psychological characteristics of its audience. In this sense art is autonomous. 26

When some 'violations' occur, it is the moment of a new branch being created between the referent-signified relationship. 'Violations' of conventional performer-audience agreements will never destroy the referent-signified relationship itself, since the decoder still decodes the 'violation', or, more precisely, the audience have to go through the process of 'interpretation' whether they like it or not. A new branch created by the emerging 'violation' depends much on the audience's concrete perceptions, which compensates for the lack of conventionality in that branch. Being highly 'concrete', such a branch proves to be unique to each and every occasion, hence the 'violation' label, but its principle, namely, the decoder's independent decision on a referent-signified relationship, remains the same. We find an example of 'violation' in Susan Melrose's comments on Deborah Warner's Electra:



The infinitely fine network of muscular worked control of [Fiona] Shaw's conjuring is stimulated and caught by the performance conditions themselves. These project a massed and relatively fixed, quasi-compulsive spectatorial gaze, onto a woman's body and bodywork. That gaze on a woman is brought to the Sophoclean complex, but it is not foreseen by it: this is Warner's Electra, a metapraxis politically charged in late-twentieth-century terms, and no longer the 'male writing' some critics continue to see there. 27

It is not unusual that the 'bodywork' of a performer on stage becomes a 'referent'; nevertheless, here in this production, the relationship between a performer and the audience seems to be a relationship of a less familiar nature. Since the play happens to be one of the classics with a long history of productions, the audience's 'signified' is likely to shape itself not only around the current Warner production but also around 'the Sophoclean complex' and around the knowledge of how past productions or the critics saw the play. The performer's body and bodywork as described by Melrose may be observed and noted by the audience in any production, but a 'quasi-compulsive' gaze will only be possible when the bodywork is perceptually so appealing that it overrides the other elements of the audience's 'signified'. In the case of Warner's Electra, the audience who are almost paralysed by Shaw's body and bodywork go through a highly concrete experience, which leads to an idiosyncratic and once-only referent-signified relationship. What is signified in that particular 'moment' is the experience of the 'gaze' itself, which, at least during that moment, is much stronger than the 'signified' established on the basis of the Sophoclean complex or of the production history. For the audience who are not particularly impressed by Shaw's bodywork, this probably will not

happen.

Another example of 'violation' can be found in Issacharoff when he takes up the birth of 'comic discourse', which he attributes to a collapse of levelled relationship among the signifier, the signified, and the referent.<sup>28</sup> When 'the signifier is distorted and even undermined -- phonologically, morphologically, or lexically', it 'may proliferate and become specular, that is, intertextual' (p. 101). Accordingly, the signified 'can be subverted and undermined, especially by a quiproquo [sic], or by the device that consists of making speakers appear absurd' (p. 101). As for the referent, it 'occupies a central place' by making itself 'visible onstage to an exaggerated extent' (p. 101) among other alternatives. As a result, the referent now has the power of manipulating a previously agreed-upon relationship between itself and the signified and of creating an uneven and disproportionate discourse. It is a 'concrete' discourse for the audience who are not used to seeing such a disproportionate presentation of performance. Once it acquires a position as part of the establishment, then the discourse is awarded the title of the 'comic' discourse.

Turning to another genre of performance, we can detect a gap between the referent and the signified in productions such as L. S. D. by the Wooster Group. From what David Savran describes, we assume that a gap is deliberately and meticulously planned and presented by the encoders. Savran defines the 'purpose' of L. S. D. as 'to expose the illusionary, manufactured quality of history and the ways in which politics, economics and ideology determine



29

what is recorded and how'. The production seems to pursue this 'purpose' by means of 'difference, the gap between present and various pasts, between reading and writing, between disparate perspectives' (p. 175). 'Gaps' are created mainly by the 'reading' task and the 'dancing' task within the performance, neither of which has been intended by the encoders to show continuity in the first place, whether it be 'temporal' continuity or 'spatial' continuity (pp. 170, 172). In that respect, there already exists a 'gap' within the structure of the performance, that is, within the tasks themselves. The encoder's intention in presenting these two tasks, however, goes much further:

Although the one is verbal and the other kinetic and gestual, L. S. D. reveals their structural equivalency, the fact that reading is itself a dance -- of denotation, connotation, memory and association. [. . .] All the action of the piece takes place within the framework of this open-ended reading (which is also a dance) in which the performers are gradually infected by the mood of the texts that they are reading. [. . .] As the years pass fictively in Parts III and IV, the reading disintegrates, the dance breaks down. Character and text become recognizable for what they are: memories, hallucinations, random fragments, a story here, a line there. (p. 197)

The deliberately created 'gap' does not simply prompt the audience to take notice of it; the 'gap' shows the audience the moment of 'reading' and 'dancing' melting together. This is a violation of what 'reading' and 'dancing' conventionally refer to in the English language. In this production, 'reading' and 'dancing' tasks ultimately transform themselves into the performers' animalistic expressions. The audience 'concretely' experience those expressions even if they find it difficult to

keep up with the whole concept of the performance. What at first seemed to be a gap between the referent and the signified has developed into the emergence of an idiosyncratic blending between the referent and the signified.

In theory, a performer may deliberately take advantage of a gap between the referent and the signified especially when part of the performer's intention is to let the audience recognise the existence of improvisatory actions in the performance. The encoder pre-plans the gap, and she also foresees how that gap will be interpreted by the audience. Provided that the encoder has a fairly accurate foresight into the 'gap', she will find it easier to improvise and also to make that improvisation more evident to the audience. In practice, though, the gap between the performer and the audience cannot be controlled very easily. From the audience's point of view, to decide on the improvisatory/non-improvisatory nature of the 'referent' will be especially difficult when that 'referent' is the performer's body as it is rather than other elements such as verbal lines or the body performing some acrobatic skills. Body-as-it-is happens when we start to 'consider the body and object as interchangeable', which 'inevitably emphasize[s] the body itself as the individual measure of space: as our first means of perceiving space'. Sally Banes describes Room Service by

Yvonne Rainer:

The ordinary movement in Room Service is not marked by 'the intensified way' in which it is carried out. The point of the dance is to make ordinary movement qua ordinary movement perceptible. The audience observes the performers navigating a cumbersome object, noting how the working bodies adjust their muscles, weights, and angles. If the dance is performed



correctly, there can be no question of superfluity of expression over the requirements of practical purposes, because the *raison d'être* of the piece is to display the practical intelligence of the body in pursuit of a mundane, goal-oriented type of action -- moving a mattress. [. . .] Room Service is not a representation of a working: it is a working. But it is also a dance -- partially because through its aesthetic context it transforms an ordinary working [. . .] into an object for close scrutiny. 31

When there is only the performer's body to observe and when that body seemingly shows nothing but ordinary movements, the audience have to interpret that body as it is. A human body's existence bears a special meaning once it is put in the performance space and the performance time, in other words, once it starts assuming the role of a referent. In the above case, what Banes calls an 'aesthetic context' justifies the 'ordinary movements' acquiring a particular meaning, in this instance, acquiring a 'dance' status. Still, the problem of the human body persists. When, for example, we are observing a performer who is seemingly simply standing, we as an audience have no definite criteria on which to make definite interpretative decisions: are the performer's particular muscular movements indeed all 'referents' or are they natural and inevitable physiological constraints that bind any human body, which this performer has no choice but to express as a human being? The question can be rephrased as: is this body to be regarded as a 'signified' of something more than simply the performer's body, or is it to be regarded as a 'signified' of this particular performer's body and nothing else, or is it the combination of the two? Difficult though it may be for the audience to decide, if 'detecting' improvisation as the 'signified' is ever possible from the audience's point of view in a non-Commedia performance, it is only possible in such uncertain

circumstances. In other words, the very uncertainty of signification leaves some room for the audience to make their own decisions on the 'referent''s improvisatory/non-improvisatory nature.

## 5.6 Space and Time as Physical Existence

A performer belonging to a traditional theatre seeks in the theatrical architecture an atmosphere which brings about a rapport between the performer and the audience in a smooth and efficient manner. As Iain Mackintosh explains:

Since smaller theatre spaces [. . .] have always proved more successful for creative theatre than larger auditoriums and since the performer's success is largely measured by the response of the audience, it follows that the density of audience as well as the size of the auditorium is central to theatre architecture. Less densely packed auditoriums dilute the response received by the performer. A single-tier auditorium is less space efficient than a multi-tier auditorium and hence more difficult for the actor to animate. In addition a more comfortable audience is generally less alert. 32

When, for example, a performance seems to ask for the audience's very close attention to a performer's subtle bodily movement, there certainly exists an interpretative discrepancy, or difference, between the audience who are in the position of observing the performer from a close range and those who are seated at the top of a multi-tier auditorium. Our question, though, lies in how exactly the performance space and the performance time involve the audience so that the audience will be sharply aware of the 'moment'. A performance environment will be here looked at from the viewpoint of space and time physically aiding, or in some cases, distracting, the audience's recognition



of a 'moment'.

The audience will be able to deal with space and time in performance easily if the performer and the audience are both tightly involved in *mise en scène*, which Patrice Pavis defines as: 'a theoretical "fitting" which consists in putting the text under dramatic and stage tension, in order to test how stage utterance challenges the text and initiates a hermeneutic circle between the text and its enunciation [. . .], thus opening up the text to several possible interpretations'.<sup>33</sup> We can infer from this definition that *mise en scène* brings about the 'moment' by means of 'tension', which the participants feel for themselves and which Pavis sees in 'a state of becoming' (p. 30). Generating 'tension' would be helped by architectural and other surrounding environments as summed up by Mackintosh, but the principles of *mise en scène* will concern the sense or the recognition of 'text and stage [being] perceived at the same time and in the same place, making it impossible to declare that the one precedes the other' (p. 29). Although Pavis excludes improvisation from the discussion of *mise en scène* (p. 24), which we assume has to do with the problem of including improvisation in 'text', his concept can still be applied to our present discussion on improvisation. The audience play a vital role in developing such 'tension', since what Pavis calls a 'hermeneutic circle' would not be completed unless there existed the eye of the audience.

Michael Issacharoff cites Cocteau's *Impromptu du Palais-Royal* and describes a theatre discourse which apparently violated what the audience of Cocteau believed to be the framework of their

theatre. The play by 'the Artaud-influenced dramatist' discards the 'traditional barrier between stage and auditorium through the use of a pseudo "playgoer" who interrupts the cast when she feels like it'.<sup>34</sup> Theatre discourse, which has always been 'closely' (p. 89) linked to space according to Issacharoff, has traditionally placed speech in a position where it has to be 'constrained' (p. 89) to match the mode, for example, a 'tragic mode' (p. 89) of theatre. Cocteau, by breaking the established framework of stage and that of auditorium, overturns the 'very basis of the constraint' and instead introduces 'the theater itself, during the performance' (p. 89). A tragic mode now loses its meaning and is replaced by some different mode of discourse. Rather than a mere shift of framework, Cocteau's attempt proves to be a blatant example of the creation of a gap concerning the signified and the referent, leading to the participants' possible awareness of experiencing a 'concrete' event, that is, a 'discourse itself turned into spectacle' (p. 119). The physical reality of stage/auditorium on the one hand provides the audience with a 'moment', including some improvisation which the audience may or may not detect. On the other hand, that kind of physical reality is likely to baffle the audience who are used to seeing a stage or an auditorium according to its own framework. In a stage/auditorium circumstance, the audience are left uncertain about any possibility of improvisation, or how to interpret the performers' action. Whichever way the audience's interpretative response falls, their experience in such circumstances most likely takes the shape of naive and straightforward surprise at



having been thrown into the 'moment' of a broken framework.

How exactly a performer uses space can be roughly categorised into two possibilities according to Schechner:

First, there is what one can do with and in a space; secondly, there is the acceptance of a given space. In the first case, one creates an environment by transforming a space; in the second case, one negotiates with an environment, engaging in a scenic dialogue with a space. In the created environment transformed space engineers the arrangement and behavior of the spectators; in a negotiated environment a more fluid situation leads sometimes to the performance being controlled by the spectators. 35

In practical terms, most performances contain at least some portions of both created and negotiated environments, the proportion of which will vary from production to production or from performance to performance. The audience in an elaborately 'transformed' space seem to be able to react to the performance, but, since the space already frames the audience to suit the performer's intentions, the audience's apparently spur-of-the-moment reactions actually tend to be straitjacketed as long as they remain a reasonably peaceful audience. Improvisation in such a space may be planned with a specific effect in mind and may be conducted efficiently. The audience who go along with a highly 'artificial' space, for example, who readily accept the world of a forest created with cardboard on stage, feel confident in appreciating and interpreting the performance partly because the created environment keep the audience's attention in focus. The audience are likely to take note of any element that however slightly incites alarm or some unexpected excitement within that particular 'world'. Whether or not such disturbance of an 'artificial' space is an accident or a

carefully laid-out plan or improvisation will be judged by the audience based on their own assessment of the 'gap' between what is presented to them and what they expect from the created environment. Nevertheless, a transformed space can also be quite baffling to the audience, if 'concretely' enjoyable, when the creativity of a performance space goes far beyond the area of familiarity which the audience have built up from the past experiences with theatre and performance. The audience then would have to make their own decisions despite having no reliable frameworks. In the case of a 'given' environment, the audience may be more consciously aware of a once-and-only particularity of the space. An extreme particularity means the lack of a reliable 'norm' for interpretation. A negotiated space sometimes depends so much on how the audience participate in the space as pointed out by Schechner, which justifies the non-existence of a definite 'norm'. Such highly concrete and particular space-performer-audience circumstances may result in a nearly total freedom for some members of the audience in their interpretative decision-making, whereas for other members the circumstances may seem nearly impossible to make decisions.

Space and time physically influence, and sometimes even shape, the audience's interpretation of a performance. Still, the actual scale and the quality of space and time hardly matter unless the audience choose to, or are tempted to, 'sense' the 'moment' of a performance.

## 5.7 Performers' Responsibility and the Role of the Audience

The notion of performance seems to give way to that of performer



in the sense that it is the performer who calls the final shot in the space and at the time of the performance. Improvisation is an action of a performer even if planned by someone else, for example, the director. According to Sally Banes, who writes on the field of dance, improvisation differs from 'chance techniques'. Banes describes 'chance techniques' in Cunningham:

Through the use of chance -- employing charts, coin-tossing, dice-throwing, and clues from the I Ching to select elements in a predetermined gamut of movements, body parts, or stage spaces -- [Merce] Cunningham had developed a technical style characterized by unexpected juxtapositions of actions. 36

These chance techniques 'had the salutary effect of loosening the choreographer's conscious control over the dance' (p. 103), while 'the initial gamut of movement choices from which the chance combinations were made still came from Cunningham's personal inventions' (p. 103). Although the dancers in Story are supposedly given a 'choice' at certain moments of performance, Banes concludes that 'chances' in Story are not to be identified with improvisation (p. 108). What chance techniques require inevitably brings the director and the choreographer, in this case Cunningham himself, to the centre of the process of making choices, since:

In giving up control (via chance techniques) over such elements as timing, spacing, and sequencing, Cunningham needed to assert even more careful control in a different direction over his dancers. For one thing, if the dancers were not carefully coordinated, the varying speeds and complicated movement patterns might lead to accidents. For another, strict direction was necessary since the dancers could not rely on musical phrasing or other conventional methods to synchronize their movements. In other words, the creator's vast freedom in handling his compositional materials led to a richness of content but, simultaneously, to a tightening of the reins over his performers.

(p. 109)

Although not taking 'full' control of spatial and temporal factors of the performance, Cunningham in fact takes control of performers' spatial and temporal movements, which in the end hinders the performers in Story from calling the shots of their own. In using 'chance techniques', it is not Cunningham's intention to hand freedom to the only people who have the power to exert a sense of 'living' during performance. The freedom, if given, would enable the performers to establish some kind of 'sharing' relationship with the audience. In Story, freedom seems to be almost non-existent: the performers are too squarely framed by the obligation to follow 'chance' for the sake of accomplishing 'chance'. The audience of Merce Cunningham and his company may have prior knowledge of Cunningham's interest in 'improvisation'; the audience therefore may expect the company's actual performance to look improvisatory to them. It is likely that the real performance in fact will look highly structured rather than improvisatory.

Improvisation, as Banes explains, 'allows for movement content and performance style beyond any gamut of the choreographer's imagination' (p. 109), giving the power of control to performers themselves. Among other performers discussed by Banes is Yvonne Rainer, who, during her Some Thoughts on Improvisation, 'lists three aspects of choice: impulses, anti-impulses, ideas' (p. 224) to '[dissect] the choicemaking patterns of improvisation' (p. 224). Rainer demonstrates the performer's inalienable, and righteous, action



to follow 'instinct' (p. 224). A 'failed' performance (p. 109) will be more likely to occur in improvisation than in chance techniques for the very reason that no one will be able to predict exactly how the 'living' moment will turn out until that moment is lived by the performer and the audience.

Once the performer is in the position of drawing concentrated attention from the audience, the performance becomes a spatial and temporal opportunity for the performer to submit herself to some kind of experiment, of which the same performer will take direct responsibility as well as credit. Spalding Gray writes:

The way that I interpreted Schechner's theories was that I was free to do what I wanted, be who I was, and trust that the text would give this freedom a structure. The text was like a wave I was riding, and the way in which I rode that wave was up to me. This was liberating for me because it allowed me to be more creative. This process seemed to work. The audience seemed to make the internal connections necessary to bring the text and actions together. There was a kind of counterpoint, or dialectic, that met in a third place, the eye of the audience. It became a creative act for them. [. . .] Second, I discovered that text and action could exist separately and be understood. This led to the way in which we constructed our first original work, Sakonnet Point. It led me to the desire to create an open narrative of personal actions and to see if the audience could, and would, tie them together. It was maintaining the same dialectic, but dropping the text and allowing the mind of each audience member the chance to create its own text. I was the role, and the text into which I fit was to be within the audiences' imaginations. This was my idea of audience participation. 37

Granted that Gray does not use the term 'improvisation' nor does he employ any word comparable to it, Gray's description of his own approach to the performance nevertheless can be regarded as evidence to the supposition that the performer is assuming control of the performance when he or she is allowed to 'create'. The actual result of the creation itself matters less than the

fact that the performer is creating and also that the audience somehow 'participate' in the creating exercise. Such an experience-oriented objective of a performance seems to concur with Lars Kleberg's explanation on the 'focus' of 'production artists':

It was not until the centre of gravity shifted from the producer viewed as a solitary subject to the relationship between producer and audience, and thus to the question of how art exerted its influence, that the old opposition between form and content [. . .] could be reformulated. 38

Focussing attention on the interaction between the performer and the audience eventually leads to our appreciation of such interaction itself as a performance. When the performer-audience interaction is pushed to a near extreme, then we have performances such as happenings or environmental theatre as described by Schechner, in which 'the audience is encouraged to structure the events as they wish -- there is no "best" and "worst" seat because the game has no single, all-encompassing, and immutable structure'.<sup>39</sup> To use Stanton B. Garner Jr's<sup>40</sup> words, the 'circuitry linking performer and spectator' is what a performance needs when it drops everything else. When such 'circuitry' happens, both the performer and the audience have every opportunity to sense the 'moment', which is ideal for the performer to explore improvisatory elements.

For some performers in dance, Yvonne Meier among them, improvisation is 'a statement about what dance is and what bodies mean in our culture' rather than 'a means to a finished product',<sup>41</sup> which can be regarded as one way of understanding the ultimate situation, namely, showing the performers themselves to



the audience. Meier thinks that the audience, on their part, will be 'made privy to the dancer's creative process' (p. 345), which means the breaking up of 'hierarchies' (p. 345) that divide the performer and the audience apart. Performers' willingness to present themselves, especially their bodies, to the audience has to be counterbalanced by the audience who are ready to accept such performers as being in the 'creative process' and to regard the very process as a performance. The 'circuitry' fails if the balance cannot be maintained, and this seems to explain a practical difficulty in attempting improvisation for an audience of unspecified number or quality:

Three or four times we did wholly improvisatory shows for small, selected audiences. There was no publicity. These were one-shot things. This kind of performing cannot be repeated too often. The atmosphere is special too. There is the risk that the improvisation may fail; the public must be aware of that and prepared to accept it. You can improvise in this way during festivals or workshops. You can't do it for an audience off the street. 42

When the audience are expected to observe the performer inside out so that the performer's 'self' will come out in the open, the performer-audience circuitry requires certain environmental conditions, as we saw in the preceding section, which will enable the performer to concentrate on presenting herself, or her body, and the audience to concentrate on absorbing that 'self' or 'body'.

## 5.8 Breaking Down the Performer-Audience Hierarchy

If such a circuitry helps to disintegrate the performer-audience hierarchy that allegedly exists in performance, we might think

that the breaking-up of the hierarchy is a realisation of what Alan Read describes with regard to Derrida:

The question of the 'Public' and its disappearance in the theatre act is one which is central to the proposition of a relation between theatre and everyday life. It is an important concept to which Derrida returns in an analysis of Rousseau, in Of Grammatology. Derrida here outlines a theatre that is at odds with the Western tradition, as is Artaud's [. . .]. Derrida summarises that what Rousseau criticises in his 'Letter to M. d'Alembert', [sic] is not the content of spectacle, but representation itself. What could take the place of this theatre, where the actor speaks in words other than their own? What will take its place is reminiscent of a theatre of everyday life, a 'nature' theatre [. . .]. Here oppositions and polarities of theatre, audience and performer, seer and seen, will dissolve, will deconstruct. 43

On the one hand, the performer is 'speaking' in 'words' of her own when she lets the audience be 'privy' to her 'creative process'. That way, the very nature of the audience changes: the audience still exist but now in a different, deconstructed way. It is precisely because of such a 'new' relationship between the performer and the audience that the actual performance can become, in Read's words, a 'new event' (p. 215), an event in which 'no movement is repeatable the same way twice' (p. 215). On the other hand, the kind of theatre or performance described above is difficult to materialise unless the performance will look more like a ritual. Victor Turner describes ritual as:

Ritual, unlike theatre, does not distinguish between audience and performers. Instead, there is a congregation whose leaders may be priests, party officials, or other religious or secular ritual specialists, but all share formally and substantially the same set of beliefs and accept the same system of practices, the same sets of rituals or liturgical actions. 44

As an example, Turner mentions Grotowski, who apparently deconstructed the dividing line between the performer and the



audience at a certain stage of his career:

In the past few years Grotowski seems to have abandoned theatre altogether to set out on what he calls 'culture searches' or 'paratheatrical experiments' like the 1977 (Summer) pilgrimage to Fire Mountain near Wroclaw in Poland, and the Global Village [. . .]. The distinctive feature of those projects was the disappearance of the audience, and the development of ritualized experiences which, to my anthropologist's eye, bear a striking resemblance to the instructions and hazards typical of successive phases of boys' and girls' puberty rites in Central America. (p. 117)

The problem is, as long as there is a person who planned the 'event' and there is another person who did not plan it but is presently participating in it, there inevitably will be a difference in attitude between the planner and the non-planner. From what Turner describes above, it seems that the gap between the two parties is thought to be eliminated, or at least made less prominent, when both the performer and the audience have the conviction that they together believe in the same thing, in the same 'practice'. This is quite different from saying that the gap between the 'priests' or their equivalents and the rest of the 'congregation' or their equivalents are eliminated from a third party's point of view. In the case of rituals, the third party's opinion presumably would not matter much. The important aspect of the congregation would reside in the fact that the participants actually can feel their belief in their faith. When Ann Halprin writes about the performance called Myth, the title Myth and the word 'ritual' used in her article seem suggestive:

For 10 consecutive Thursdays, starting in October 1967, groups of about 50 people came to the Dancers' Workshop studios in San Francisco. Most of them expected a 'performance', and instead found themselves 'performers'. The Workshop had attempted to

prepare the public by mailing the [. . .] announcement [titled Myth], but people were too pre-conditioned to understand what the release meant, and could only be convinced by the actual experience.

The 'audience' were, by and large, neither homogeneous nor an in-group. They were a mixture of hippies, student groups from the San Francisco Institute of Art, all types of businessmen, dance students and professionals, architects, city planners, psychotherapists, tourists, and those lured by our reputation for nude performers. In short: no pattern.

Although each Myth was different, the central idea of every evening was to release people's buried creativity by answering one of their basic needs through ritual.

[. . .] Certain general conditions were suggested to the group in the briefing room. Thereafter, anyone was free to participate or observe. A few people left. But the vast majority stayed, participated, even participated ecstatically. For some it was simply fun, for some a bore, for some extraordinarily sensual, for some a Happening, for some a kind of atavistic tribal reawakening. For me, it was all these things -- and a new explosion. 45

The audience who feel confident in the 'ritual' stay, while those who do not find the 'ritual' to their liking can express their boredom or dissatisfaction or leave the place. Even though the performance is highly ritualistic, whether or not it is experienced as a 'ritual' depends entirely on the individual participants. Such a precarious nature of participation is what makes Halprin's project a 'performance' and not, strictly speaking, a 'ritual'. In the case of a performance which does not hint or does not intend to hint at any ritualistic means or ends, we are even less certain about the possibility of the participants ever having any common belief or any conviction of a common belief.

A 'gap' between the performer and the audience gives a performance the meaning which a ritual cannot fulfil. When we turn our eyes to improvisation in this respect, we find that a



ritual or a quasi-ritual performance will have more to do with bringing about a constant equilibrium which will ingest the whole participants, as we saw in chapter 4. In such circumstances, the participants are more likely to regard improvisation as a righteous part of the canon, not as improvisation. The participants for a brief second may sense the 'moment' of an improvisatory action, but the next second they will be obliged to take in that 'moment' according to the law of the ritual. Everything initiated by the 'priests' is regarded as something of a perfection. In a non-ritualistic performance or in a performance which uses a 'ritual' only as a kind of experiment, the participants are free of any rules or any bindings which would automatically prompt them to interpret the 'moment' as being 'proper'. A gap, or any potential gap, between the performer and the audience is vital, because the participants are capable of sensing the 'moment' as part of a 'performance' only when there is a mental as well as physical buffer between one another. Grotowski's 'attempt at direct confrontation and self-revelation'<sup>47</sup> before he decides to abandon the concept of 'audience' stresses such a 'gap'. Daphna Ben Chaim calls it 'distance' (p. 45) and states: 'the spectator is aware, "consciously or unconsciously", that the actor's performance is separate from him or her, and that it is an "invitation". Implied in the voluntary nature of the event is that the spectator has the choice to accept the performance and respond to it, or to reject it and choose not to engage in self-penetration' (p. 45).

We can also take advantage of the 'gap' between the performer and the audience by creating an 'official' game out of the existence of such a 'gap'. This is the idea based on which Theatresports has been developed:

Theatresports started as a game with two teams of improvisors competing against each other for points which were based on the execution of rudimentary improvisation and performance skills and awarded by a panel of judges. [. . .] One team would take the stage for an agreed period of time and, at the end of their allotted time, the opposing team could challenge for the stage. Each team would perform a scene based on the specific challenge, and the winner of the challenge would take the stage. [. . .] [The audience] voice their approval by simply calling out the names of the team they prefer; the judges also may call a 'boring' to remove a team from the stage or to issue a warning that a scene end within a certain amount of time. Audience participation is encouraged by asking them to provide locations, occupations, relationships, experiences, or situations to be used within the improvised scene. Another technique is to involve members of the audience in the scene on stage. The audience is always encouraged to 'boo' the judges if they disagree and to vocalize their reactions to whatever is happening on stage. 48

The performer and the audience share the performance together by participating in the same 'game', but the rule of the 'game' makes it clear that the performer and the audience are separate, independent groups of people who keep to their respective roles of performing and approving/disapproving. This is a 'game' which reflects on the 'gap' through the participants' deliberate 'playing' of the gap. The performer-audience hierarchy persists, though, even during such a game, and it seems that the 'gap' always goes beyond the participants' capacity for mocking it:

During the 1984 Fringe Theatre Festival in Edmonton the performances of Theatresports were among the best attended; by week's end, lines were two hours long. [Marilyn] Herasymovych finds an anomaly in this popularity, however. The popularity is presumably based in part upon the verbal participation of the audience in the performance; but although Theatresports performers ask for audience contribution many times during a



performance, Herasymovych feels that these requests are very often only a pretext. The actors often seem to focus on attempting to make any audience suggestion fit a preconceived pattern upon which the actor has already decided. This is a frequent complaint. 49

Schechner in Environmental Theater lists 'objections and obstacles to audience participation', in which we find: 'Neither the actor nor the spectator is trained to deal with participation'.<sup>50</sup> In the same vein, Joseph Chaikin 'thought for a time that actors might address and even touch members of the audience, but he eventually rejected this approach as not only ineffective but assaultive'.<sup>51</sup> We can infer from these comments that trying to eliminate a gap by physically touching someone, for example, may be taken by the audience as more than an 'invitation' because it might not let the audience have mental or physical room to interpret.

The performer-audience relationship will have to give 'space' to both the performer and the audience so that they will be able to exercise their 'imagination'. Neither the performer nor the audience should be obliged to mould into the other party's intentions. As Spalding Gray writes in 'About Three Places in Rhode Island' from the performer's point of view:

I was never one or the other and could be someone or something completely different for each audience member because they also live with their 'names' and associations. It is their story as well as mine.

This theatre was concrete in its physical expression and abstract in its open narrative. It was an open mood for all to digest (reflection) and for all to play back (projection). This meeting of our imagination with the imagination of the audience seemed to open up external possibilities. This meeting of imaginations became a sort of transcendent third point somewhere in the space or in one mind, or many minds. It was always larger than myself and took me out of myself. 52

When the breakdown of the performer-audience hierarchy happens, it means that the performer is not afraid of letting the audience 'scrutinise' her bodily expressions. The performer knows that the audience will not invade her area of 'imagination' to the extent that her bodily expressions will be impeded. The audience, on their part, can fully concentrate on interpreting the performer without the fear of their 'imagination' being invaded by the performer in an overly forceful manner. Only under such an agreement can the performer explore various possibilities, including improvisation, for the 'moment' of their performance and can the audience make their part of the decision.



## 6 Improvisation in a Wider Perspective

### 6.1 Overview

Our discussion of the performer-audience relationship in chapter 5 has led us to conclude that what we call 'performance improvisation' is a practice which mainly concerns the performer rather than the audience. A performer's improvisatory actions mean nothing to the audience unless they are made to 'sense' the space and the time of the performance, which in itself does not suggest that the audience recognise 'improvisation'. In this chapter, we will look more closely at the practice of 'performance improvisation', and we will leave the audience outside our discussion throughout the chapter.

If we place a performer at the centre of the performance according to the so-called phenomenology which we will touch upon shortly, it is more precisely a performer's body that we put at the centre. A 'performance' in the realm of purely conceptual acts is outside our sphere of interest in the current discussion. Given that mind and body may not be separated clearly, as has been seen in chapter 2, we do not mean to say that a purely conceptual work completely defies any involvement of a performer's body. Nevertheless, 'body' in the present discussion refers to a body as an overt, physically tangible matter, a body which is potentially visible to the outside world. It also refers to overt, visible decision-making by a performer. 'Alone among the elements that constitute the stage's semiotic field,' Stanton B. Garner Jr states, 'the body is a sign that looks back'<sup>1</sup>. That a performer's body refuses to become a sign per se forms the principle of Garner's phenomenological approach

to performance:

Reopening phenomenological lines of investigation allows us to redress the current of antitheatricality that runs through much poststructuralist criticism, an attitude symptomatic (like all antitheatricality) of a deeper uneasiness with the body -- in this case, with the body as a site of corporeal and subjective elements that always resist reduction to the merely textual. (p. 26)

Both phenomenological approaches and poststructuralist criticism have much to do with 'the blind spots [. . .] intrinsic to any field of vision' (p. 39), but the former tend to see in the blind spots the 'ambiguities and dis-posessions of subjectivity itself' (p. 38), when the latter would handle such blind spots in terms of 'signification and textuality' (p. 38). Here we will not explore the idea of phenomenology any deeper, but the shifting point seems to be clear: to people like Garner, a performer's body operates not only as another signifier but more importantly as a receptacle and amplifier of a performer's mind. The 'ambiguity' which Garner talks about refers not to the body's ambiguity as a 'sign' but rather to a performer's mental and physical ambiguities in decision-making and also to the way she concretises her decisions through her body. Such 'decision-making' is explained by David Cole in the light of improvisation: '[. . .] one does not know whether to call the activity in question "reading" or "writing". I am going to argue that it is uncertainty on this score -- and not, for example, any "freshness" or "spontaneity" that may or (as here) may not be present -- which marks activity as improvisatory'.<sup>2</sup> A performer's ambiguous existence is a reflex of how she is living



the moment of performance. To use Cole's terms, a performer does not live such a moment by reading into any 'script' (p. 104) nor does she clearly live in the world of 'writing'. This particular kind of ambiguity presupposes the notion that a performer's body has its value by simply being at the centre of the performance. As Deborah Jowitt states, '[. . .] the human body [. . .] can never be a neutral artistic medium. It is never inexpressive. It is not, in fact, an "it" but the physical manifestation of a gendered and unique person'.<sup>3</sup> A performer's decision-making determines how, when, and to what extent her intrinsic being reveals itself as an overt bodily action.

Once we recognise a performer's body at the centre of the performance, it means that we perceive the performer in a 'superior' status than where we are, simply because we will never become the performer and thus will never occupy that centre for ourselves. What a performer decides and what her body overtly shows us during performance now split from our criticism, which guarantees the performer a firm position at the centre of the performance. The very moment of her experiencing a performance may never be expressed in any other way on any other occasions even by the performer herself, but the performer's post-performance comments, descriptions, and records become 'authentic' materials in their own right. For example, when Chaikin asks such questions as the ones below, all we can say from a strictly performer-oriented point of view is that we have to turn to the performers for an answer:

When an actor responds to an imaginary stimulus, he himself chooses and shapes that stimulus. He has the potential for a

deep contact with that stimulus, since it is privately chosen. This contact brings up energy for the actor's use. On one level or another he is given energy by his inner promptings, associations, that part of his life which is already lived.

From what part of himself is he drawing these associations as he performs? Does he draw from information and ideas of the character, the audience, and his self-image? Does he draw from a 'body memory'? Does he draw his impulse from a liberated consciousness or from the same consciousness which he believes to be necessary for his daily personal safety? Does he draw from a common human source or from the contemporary bourgeois ego? 4

The performers' answers to these questions will then be analysed and interpreted by critics. In this chapter, many of the examples of performances will be taken from the written materials which performers themselves have prepared for publication. We will make certain that there will be no confusion in our discussion over the performers' writings and the critics' writings.

So long as the body is placed at the centre of the performance, it may permeate such traditionally stratified fields as music, dance, and games, among other fields. Sally Banes, for example, reviews an incident of merging between dance and theatre: 'Ironically, while the avant-garde choreographers of the 1960s were involved in stripping their dances of every vestige of theatricality, the nontheatrical arts borrowed from the theater,<sup>5</sup> and the theater, stressing physicality, became more dancelike'. In the end, 'the only difference between these performances and dance performances', Banes notes, 'was that these groups still marketed themselves as theater' (p. 253). If we start our discussion from the body, we have only 'performance' instead of oppositions among 'theatre', 'dance', and so on.



## 6.2 Setting Criteria

The question of 'why' performers improvise at all will be outside the present discussion apart from the premise that the flexible human body cannot avoid improvising. The performers' decision-makings intertwine not only with the whole context of the performance but also with such innate improvising impulse.

Our criteria for reviewing individual performances in this chapter start with one general condition: actions have to be overt and thus have to have consequences. Based on this, we can first posit the cases in which a performer's body is under strict instructions such as conforming to tight choreography. In the second cases, the body only has a guideline or principle to obey. The third cases put a performer's body in the contexts which question a convention or a tradition. We will look at performances which would in a traditional sense be called dance, games, music, and writing.

## 6.3 Writing and Music

Here, writing concerns our discussion only in the sense that some people regard some particular authors' works as being improvisatory. If an author may be given the status of a performer, her decision-making is made overt through her letting the words be recorded. She may scribble the words on paper, may type them, dictate them, or, supposing she is paralysed and cannot move any part of her body, she may blink her eyes according to the set rules so that the intended words will be expressed. Whichever means she employs, a performer cannot 'write' by keeping what she wants to say in a purely conceptual

form, which tells us that writing places the body at the centre of a performance but in the most disguised way of all possible instances of performance. Gertrude Stein's The Making of Americans, for example, is viewed by Richard Bridgman as 'an improvised work of no identifiable genre in which the creator learned by doing'.<sup>6</sup> Bridgman here talks about 'genre' within the field of literature, but if we can also take Stein's writing as an improvisatory performance, it means that Stein's work challenges the convention and the tradition of grouping and labelling performances. Granted that novels characteristically posit no such formal rules as poetry does, Stein or any other novelist has no essential guidelines or principles to conform to, whether or not their writings happen to be improvisatory. This at first glance leaves those novelists with almost too wide a range of possibilities. On the other hand, since the consequences of the performance have to be quite medium-specific, namely, the written words or their equivalents, the novelists can only defy the tradition within the range of the written words. Bridgman explains Stein's 'improvisatory' writing process:

The greater part of Gertrude Stein's writing was improvisational. She used her composition books as catch-alls in which she recorded the day's activities, confessed her uncertainties, celebrated her moments of contentment, tried out new techniques, and assessed the quality of her experimentation. For long periods, even though she made no progress, she labored on, awaiting inspiration. The monotony of these thousands of pages of disconnected trivia must be acknowledged if the inventory is to be complete. [. . .] Gertrude Stein is often accused of a self-indulgent abuse of language, and yet she regarded her primary stylistic goal as accuracy of verbal expression. [. . .] Clouds of association, fragmentary statements, covert references, and the arbitrary distortion of grammatical form: these constituted Gertrude Stein's representation of her consciousness in its actual state of existence. At its most complex, her prose



is an outpouring of verbal responses to her experience mixed with fantasies generated by the primary experiences and with words stimulated by the appearance or sound of other words already on the page or still in her head. (XV)

Rather than focussing on the consequential words themselves, Bridgman brings our attention to the writer's action of mentally and physically producing the novels. The way Stein defies the convention, which we may include in our third category of the criteria, is overt enough to let other people like Bridgman call her work 'improvisatory', and yet her deliberate turning around<sup>7</sup> of convention ends up being a fixed work of 'literature'.

Music differs from writing novels in one vital sense, which we can infer from Langer: '[Music] exhibits pure form not as an embellishment, but as its very essence; we can take it in its flower -- for instance, German music from Bach to Beethoven -- and have practically nothing but tonal structures before us: no scene, no object, no fact'.<sup>8</sup> Unlike writing, music seems to have required 'form' simply because, being invisible and non-tangible, it otherwise would have made the composer's mental and physical decision-making end up in no overt consequences. Based on a solid tradition of musical forms, composers trying some improvisatory performances or improvisatory compositions have had convenient targets to improvise into or against, namely, norms and rules ranging from crystal-clear harmonic chords to roughly defined types of music. Improvisation in John Cage's music, for example, seems to operate ideally on the level of defying the entire system of music as it is understood in the West rather than on the level of merely playing against some specific musical rules and forms.

Cage's reluctance in relying on one's 'memory' is evident when he describes what he sees as the general tendency in 'improvisation' as opposed to his definition of 'indeterminacy':

[. . .] improvisation frequently depends not on the work you have to do [that is, the composition you're playing] but depends more on your taste and memory, and your likes and dislikes. It doesn't lead you into a new experience, but into something with which you're already familiar, whereas if you have work to do that is suggested but not determined by a notation, if it's indeterminate, this simply means that you are to supply the determination of certain things that the composer has not determined. 9

The question is, is there a way of experiencing 'improvisation' which is also 'indeterminate'? Granted that strict indeterminacy in a human performance may be innately incompatible with the phenomenological existence of a human body and mind, we will need an extremely well-prepared context to make the performance as indeterminate as possible. A performer has to show overtly that what she is improvising is not exactly 'know[n]' to herself (p. 222), and this turns out to be quite difficult to execute with clarity unless the context is right. Cage offers a few suggestions to 'create' indeterminacy:

The first way is to play an instrument over which you have no control, or less control than usual. The next way is to divide empty time into rooms, you could say. In those rooms try to make clear the fact those rooms are different by putting different sounds in each room. If, for instance, I made this sound in a two-minute period -- say, we now begin a two-minute period [taps rock on table after a pause of several seconds], I don't need to make the sound again in that two-minute period. I could have made the sound then or at any other time. Instead of making it once I could make it several times, but if I made it several times, it is at that point that I could move toward my taste and memory. (p. 222)

Without stipulating it in clear terms, Cage indicates the



phenomenon of an impending tendency within a performer to return to 'taste' and 'memory' even when it is the performer herself who has intentionally 'created' an indeterminate context. In order to achieve a taste-free and memory-free state, a performer has to adhere meticulously to narrow and highly specific conditions, which are intended not to allow the performer to rely on her past experience or knowledge. A model case is Cage's 'structural improvisation' (p. 224):

Given a period of time, I will divide it. Say we have eight minutes. We'll divide it into sections of either one, two, three, or four minutes long, or three parts -- four minutes, three minutes, one minute, in any order -- or whatever. Then, if I have ten sounds, I can find out through the use of chance operations which of those ten sounds go in the first section, which go in the second section, and which go in the third. Then I improvise using the number of sounds that have been determined for the first section, the number of sounds for the second and the number of sounds for the third, and I will have an improvisation which is characterized by a change of sound at those different times, no matter what I play. (p. 224)

We can see here that one of the most reliable ways of securing a relatively memory-free state is to use 'chance'. If a performer seeks after the purity of indeterminacy, she in effect is obliged to determine the potential indeterminacy very precisely. By citing his own work, Music of Changes, Cage explains this paradox of determinacy as a means of achieving indeterminacy:

Though no two performances of the Music of Changes will be identical [. . .], two performances will resemble one another closely. Though chance operations brought about the determinations of the composition, these operations are not available in its performance. The function of the performer in the case of the Music of Changes is that of a contractor who, following an architect's blueprint, constructs a building. That the Music of Changes was composed by means of chance operations identifies the composer with no matter what eventuality. But that its notation is in all respects determinate does not permit



the performer any such identification: his work is specifically laid out before him. He is therefore not able to perform from his own center but must identify himself insofar as possible with the center of the work as written. 10

As shown here, the paradox is most plainly apparent when the 'composer' and the 'performer' happen to be different individuals. Cage then gives an example of pieces which, in contrast to his Music of Changes, aims at indeterminacy without employing chance operations:

In the case of the Intersection 3 by Morton Feldman, structure may be viewed as determinate or as indeterminate; method is definitely indeterminate. Frequency and duration characteristics of the material are determinate only within broad limits (they are with respect to narrow limits indeterminate); the timbre characteristic of the material, being given by the instrument designated, the piano, is determinate; the amplitude characteristic of the material is indeterminate. Form conceived in terms of a continuity of various weights -- that is, a continuity of numbers of sounds, the sounds themselves particularized only with respect to broad range limits (high, middle, and low) -- is determinate, particularly so due to the composer's having specified boxes as time units. Though one might equally describe it as indeterminate for other reasons. The term 'boxes' arises from the composer's use of graph paper for the notation of his composition. The function of the box is comparable to that of a green light in metropolitan thoroughfare control. The performer is free to play the given number of sounds in the range indicated at any time during the duration of the box, just as when driving an automobile one may cross an intersection at any time during the green light. With the exception of method, which is wholly indeterminate, the compositional means are characterized by being in certain respects determinate, in others indeterminate, and an interpretation of these opposites centers in a state of non-obstruction and interpenetration. (p. 36)

We find a mesh of determinacy and indeterminacy in Intersection 3. A performer is offered a reliable set of guidelines, which by no means follow any musical forms in traditional senses but instead are the bases for a set of certain contexts. These contexts require a performer's overt, physical and mental



decision-making and actions during the moment of performance. Inevitably a performer in this piece will not completely forgo her taste or memory; having an opportunity to make one's own decisions automatically means that all our past experiences will be consulted in one way or another. This particular piece does not intend to discover the most efficient way of subduing a performer's personal factors such as taste and memory. It is the balance between determinate and indeterminate factors that the piece tries to set here in order to let its performers make some actions without thinking too deeply or delving too profoundly into taste and memory. Having mentioned Intersection 3 as quoted above, Cage then reviews later works of his own, such as Imaginary Landscape No. IV for twelve radios and the Music of Changes for piano (p. 57), which he asserts are 'structurally similar to [his] earlier work' (p. 57). His later works, however, differ fundamentally in physical realisations of their structures from his earlier works, which Cage himself explains:

Formerly, [. . .] these lengths were time-lengths [based on a number of measures having a square root, so that the large lengths have the same relation within the whole that the small lengths have within a unit of it], whereas in the recent work the lengths exist only in space, the speed of travel through this space being unpredictable. (p. 57)

Here, a linear approach of throwing a dice and pinning down the next step gives way to an approach in which how the performer throws a dice becomes an 'unpredictable' context itself. Cage's term 'space' above implies the kind of indeterminacy that allows a performer's physical body to move not merely as an executor of chance operations but also as part of a living, decision-maker.

The established 'forms' of music in the West can quite readily provide musical pieces such as a fugue by Bach or fragments of pieces such as a cadenza within a concerto. Those pieces give a performer, for example, an organist, a certain freedom during performance which belongs to the second category of our criteria. On the other hand, indeterminacy in Cage's sense especially in his later works has little to do with such progressive exploration of musical forms. Despite the fact that any 'improvisation' piece will be one of 'open' works to use Umberto Eco's term,<sup>11</sup> be it a Bach piece or a Cage piece, we note a difference among those pieces in their approaches towards the 'forms'. Eco briefly cites Stockhausen and Berio (p. 1), whose works we may put between Bach and Cage: they both seem to defy the whole concept of form rather than exploring some specific forms as in Bach's music, but, compared to Cage's later works, they maintain their performers' position as executors of 'chances'. If 'chances' can be regarded as a form unto itself, the importance lies more in how the chances will be realised than in how a performer exists in mind and body during the moment of performance.

#### 6.4 Games

Kirby links various performances which we call happenings, games, tasks, or dance by stating that they have all been prompted by a shift in the status of 'exercises', that is, from the traditional 'training values'<sup>12</sup> of exercises to their merging with 'performance'. From Kirby's brief sum-up, we can trace the beginning of a game as a performance piece in its own right:



Exercises [. . .] are frequently used in the new theatre for their performance qualities and expressiveness rather than for their training values.

I believe that it was this same exercise that opened the first public performances of the Open Theatre. These presentations, which began in December, 1963, and continued into 1965, combined various exercises and short plays on the same bill. It would be foolish to claim a kinship with Happenings for these 'variety' programs, but one wonders whether the similarity between the exercises and certain 'game' and task-oriented work by, among others, the Judson Dance Theatre did not suggest the possibility of presenting the exercises, which were designed to be done privately, to the public. (p. 13)

Here we will mainly look at games which are not exactly 'performances' in the strict sense of the term but are more than a series of simple warming-up exercises. Especially with regard to improvisation, games we are concerned with involve a performer's decision-making and its expression in bodily actions according to the rules of the games.

Rules can be regarded as the most distinguishable feature of what we call a 'game'. Given that performers/players can make the rules of games by themselves if they want to, it is when the rules are already set for a universal application that we start our discussion. Games in general belong to our second category of the criteria. Their rules are 'written' quite specifically in order to give a performer an opportunity to interpret and 'use' them to her advantage, not in order to bind her to 'correct' actions. In games played on social occasions, the participants are put in a situational framework which allows them to behave differently from the way they behave in everyday life. In such circumstances, a game begins according to its rules but some of the participants already may be thinking that they are willing to fool around with the rules if possible and to try something which

people might not condone in everyday-life. Clive Barker notes that the rules of a game can actually be taken over by such 'hidden' motivations in the course of a game-playing.<sup>13</sup> Here, the crucial point seems to be that the original rules of such a game are not only specific and relatively simple but are understood by the participants as a rather loosely-set guideline which could be flouted or manipulated without any serious 'penalty' in sight. If game-playing may be regarded as an occasion for 'writing' as well as 'reading', games played on social occasions with a possible turning-over of the rules may be taken as some of the extreme examples of a strongly motivated 'writing' and 'reading'. They are also improvisation in its wider sense of the term. According to David Cole, 'improvisation itself may best be understood as a limiting case of acting as reading, in which the actor simultaneously "writes" what he "reads"'.<sup>14</sup> With the existence of those socially-oriented games in mind, here in our discussion we will concentrate on games themselves rather than on their pragmatic potentialities.

A game performer/player's overt action leads to consequences which, if successful, bring her to win the game. This is to say that 'writing' in games has a quite specific goal to achieve. There are, however, also cases in which winning ceases to be the objective or in which games are structured so as not to produce any winners.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, what is common among what we call 'games' in our present discussion seems to be that the participants of games have solid rules into which they may 'write' but not to the extent of placing too serious a meaning or



value on the games' results.

#### 6.4.1 From Christine Poulter, Playing the Game

Christine Poulter introduces some of the games which children would be familiar with but which Poulter intends to use for the training of a performer or a group of performers. If we particularly look for the games that encourage improvisatory decision-makings and actions on the part of the participants, we find a few different kinds of improvisatory skills required in the games. Especially pertinent to those skills is the question raised over an 'intelligent' decision-making and an 'instinctive' decision-making. Although all decision-makings in games have to be sufficiently quick, which seems to be a common understanding among the participants, there are games that primarily call for a performer's physical strength and dexterity while there are games that principally test a performer's mental flexibility and vigilance.

'Alley Cats' is played as follows:

```

xx
x      x x x
x      x x x
x      x x x
x      x x x
x      x x x

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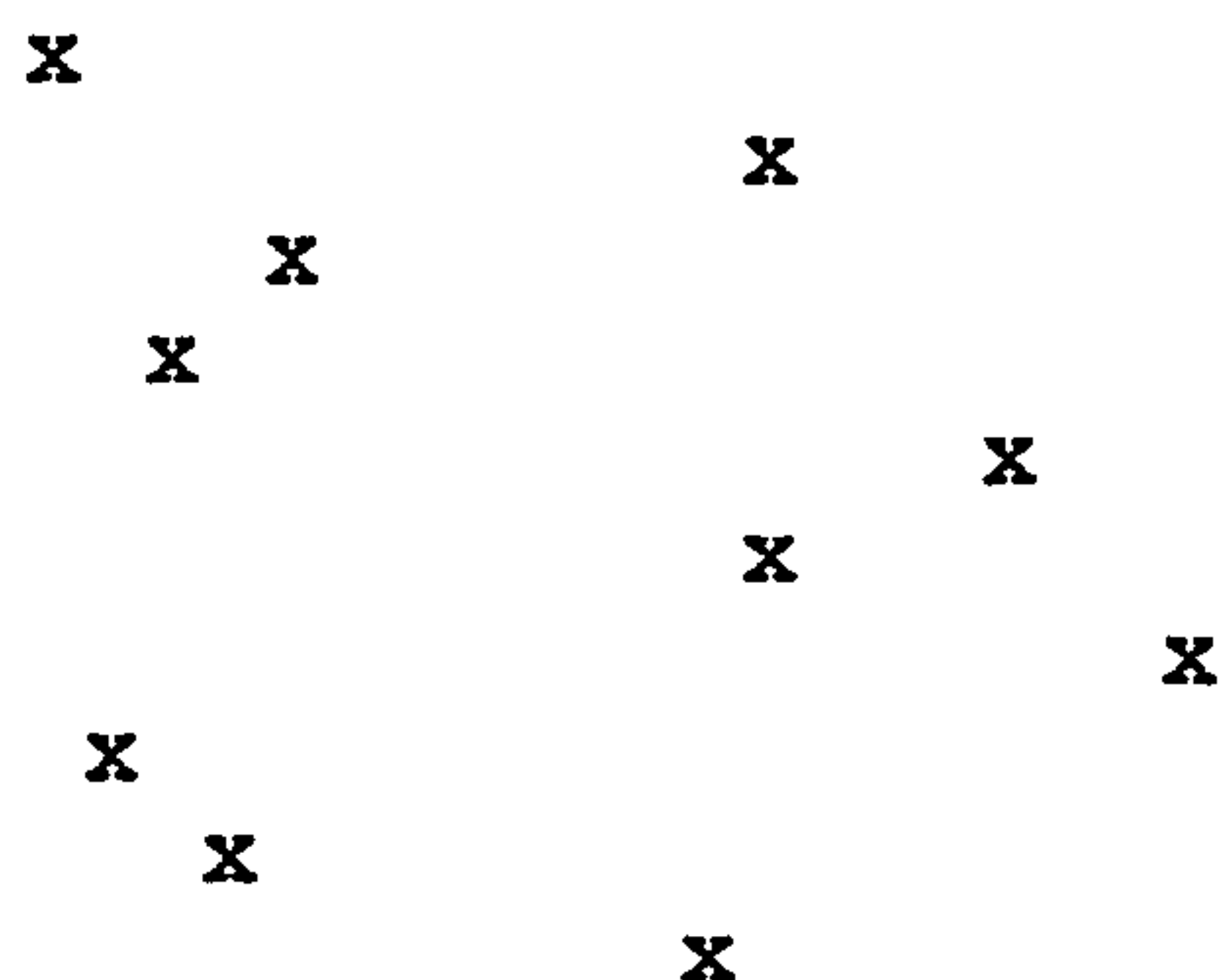
1. Two players are chosen, one to be the cat the other to be the mouse.
2. The other players stand in rows of equal numbers.
3. There must be enough space to left and right, front and back of each player for the cat and mouse to run through the gaps.
4. The players in the rows form a series of passages by lifting their arms and so closing the gaps to their left and right.

- This forms passages that run from side to side.
5. At a signal from the session leader the players turn to their right, arms still lifted, which will form passages that run from front to back.
  6. At the next signal they turn to face front and so on.
  7. The cat now chases the mouse up and down the passages.
  8. The session leader can change the direction of the passages at any time.
  9. If the cat catches the mouse they reverse roles.
  10. After a couple of minutes another pair are chosen to take over as cat and mouse. 16

For the simple reason that neither the cat nor the mouse calls the shots to decide which passage they will go through, there cannot be any strategically improvisational actions involved. What is required of the cat and the mouse almost exclusively concerns their physical ability to react promptly to the shift of the passage and also to run fast enough either to catch or to escape. Even if the mouse or the cat thinks that she instinctively catches on the leader's signalling pattern and mentally as well as physically expects the next turn to take, it will be considered as the kind of action which any human being on any occasion would innately facilitate, and it could hardly be called what we here regard as improvisation in Cole's sense. It is a game which is most close to the first category of our criteria, since the cat and the mouse, virtually the sole 'performers' in this game, have no choice but to follow the way paved for them by a leader. The rule leaves little room for the performers to 'write' upon it.

'Blind Killer' compared to 'Alley Cats' seems to be a game with more improvisatory possibilities:





1. The players put on blindfolds and move around the room.
2. The session leader chooses one player to be the Hunter and whispers this fact to that player.
3. The Hunter tries to catch all the other players.
4. The Hunter catches someone by tapping on the 'victim's' shoulder three times.
5. The 'victim' screams and 'dies'.
6. When a player has been caught s/he may take off the blindfold and watch the rest of the chase, silently. (p. 84)

The performers of this game rely on their auditory and/or tactile sensibilities, based on which they decide on their movements in order that they will be out of reach from the 'Hunter'. Instead of following the already-drawn passage, the performers in this case have at least several choices of movements. Measuring the distance between the Hunter and themselves, and also their position against other performers, with the help of the voices of the 'victims', the not-yet-caught performers may decide, for example, to deliberately slide backwards, sideways, or forward. Nevertheless, the performers' decision-making is severely hampered by their not being able to see, which results in their overt actions being more like a blind guess. As for the player of 'Hunter', her decision-making will be no less of a guesswork. Although 'Hunter' always has all the directions to choose from when she is about to make a move, she on the other hand will never 'win' unless she actually catches someone. Until

she does, the rest of the performers are 'winning'. In that sense, improvisatory aspects of this game can even be looked at as belonging to our third category of the criteria simply because 'luck' plays a vital part of the materialisation of the game.

In 'Granny's Footsteps', players can see one another and are able to judge the situation more accurately in terms of how they should make overtly physical movements:

```

      x
      x
      x
      x           x
      x
      x
      x

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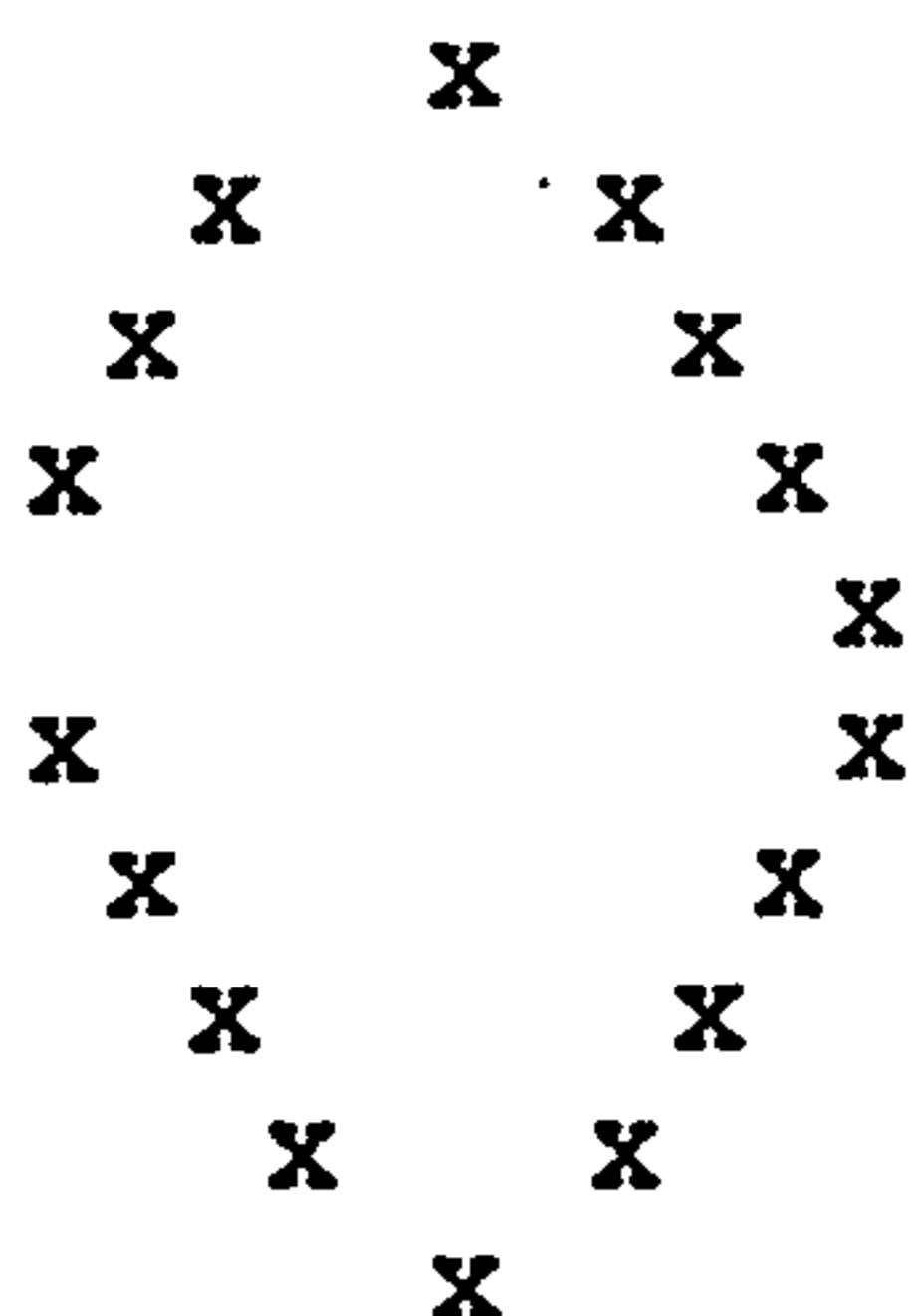
1. One player, A, stands at one end of the room, facing the wall.
2. The other players stand in a line at the opposite end of the room.
3. When the session leader calls 'Go' the players move towards A.
4. The first player to touch A on the back is the winner.
5. A can turn round at any point in the game and if s/he sees any player moving s/he can send them back to the beginning.
6. When A turns round everyone freezes.
7. The winner becomes the next A. (p. 37)

Improvisatory possibilities centre around the way the players approach 'A'. While detecting the subtle motions of 'A', who is about to look back, and trying to react to 'A''s motions instantly by halting their physical movements, the players have to move forward. Their decision-makings are to be calculated without being pre-planned, which we can call improvisation.



Players may attempt to make slow movements or fast movements according to their observation of how often and how quickly 'A' turns. Compared to 'Blind Killer', players' mental aspects are more actively and sensitively stimulated in this game, which is helped by the game having a quite specific goal. At the same time, this is a highly physical game in that the players' 'lives' depend entirely upon their movements not being seen by 'A', which requires a swift command over the body. 'A' also has some freedom in calculating her pattern of looking back, which again can be called an improvisatory action.

Some of the games introduced by Poulter characteristically do not have any objectives of 'winning'. They are 'games' not in the sense that participants test their physical and mental abilities for the sake of scoring high points. As we can see in 'Cross the Circle' below, 'games' can also emphasise a more purely 'expressive' side of a player instead of her win/lose situations, and improvisation accordingly becomes less openly functional while more openly 'performance'-like:



1. Everyone sits in a circle.
2. The session leader gives each player a number: 1, 2 or 3.
3. All the number ones stand up.
4. All the number ones must cross the circle and sit down on the other side.
5. Whilst crossing the circle each player has to act as though moving through a particular environment, chosen by the

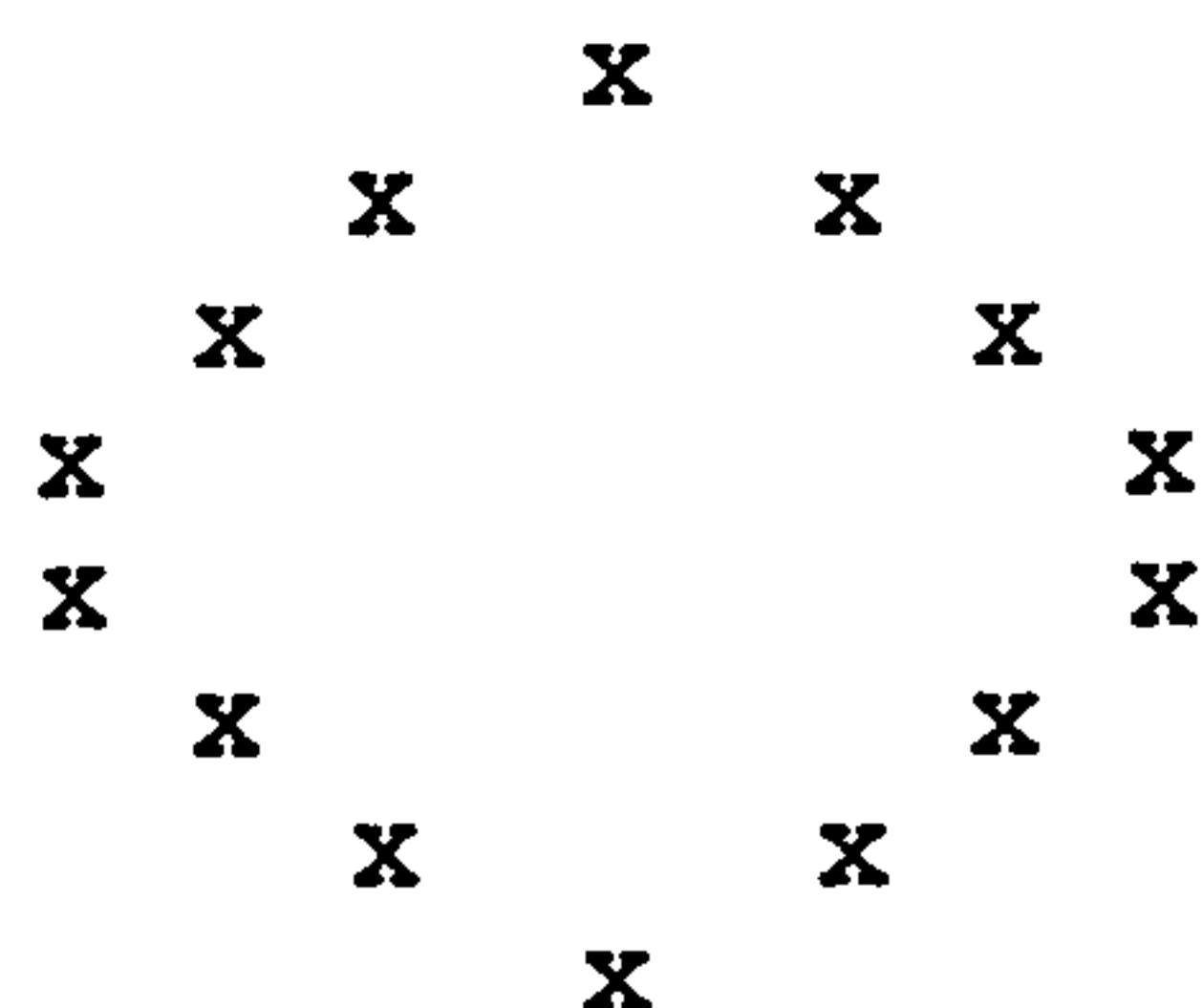
session leader, for example a high wire in the circus, the moon, etc.

6. Number twos and then number threes are given different environments to try. (p. 34)

Rather than competing with the other players, a player in this game simply responds to a certain 'environment' by visualising her 'feel' for that environment with her body. That she does not know the 'environment' till the leader tells it to her, that she has to complete her 'act' in a reasonable amount of time to keep up with the other players, and that she has space around her to be used freely make this game a compact case for an improvisatory action in a traditional and performative sense. We have little difficulty in imagining such a group as the Open Theatre showing the actions which fundamentally have no difference from 'Cross the Circle' as a piece of performance and not as a game. On the other hand, there is a problem in 'Cross the Circle' being regarded as an effective 'game' of improvisation. A performer in 'Cross the Circle' characteristically cannot make her overt mental-physical action until she first takes in the given 'environment' by interpreting it in her own way. As discussed before, such interpretative opportunities often produce 'cliché'. In 'Cross the Circle', 'cliché' tends to come out easily, since the way the game is structured forces each player to think, however briefly, or to reflect upon what to do when her turn comes. A performer's interpreting process is more likely to become a process of exercising her intellectual imagination rather than a process of following her intuition. Meanwhile, 'cliché' or not, this particular game demands a player's decision-making to be decisively visual.



Among the games that feature how to cooperate with the other players we can first take up 'Machines':



1. Everyone stands in a circle.
2. One player goes in to the centre of the circle and begins the game with a movement and sound which s/he keeps repeating until the whole machine is complete.
3. A second player joins the machine with a movement and sound which complements that being made by the first player.
4. One by one the rest of the group quickly join in until the machine is complete. (p. 42)

This game, having no win/lose situation as a specific goal, may be taken as a group-oriented version of 'Cross the Circle'.

Instead of playing a certain 'environment' individually, players improvise parts of a 'machine'. A player seems to be more tightly bound in this game than in 'Cross the Circle' in the sense that she has to blend in the machine-in-progress, which is not necessarily shaping itself in the manner she prefers. Those who join the machine at a later stage might find that their choices are getting narrower. Conversely, though, players can make their decisions quite freely on the basis of what the word 'machine' implies. Simply because machines in the real world could be of any shape and of any size, players do not have to worry about the authenticity of their 'machine' as long as it keeps the general image held by themselves towards real machines. Such a lenient condition can help to bring out a player's quite

pure instincts in adding her own part to the others' parts; she does not have to 'think' and interpret as in the case of 'Cross the Circle'. Her mental and physical instincts made visible through an overt action and sound can only instinctively be valued by herself and by the other players as to their appropriateness. No one can categorically deny any of the players' decisions since there are no 'right' or 'wrong' machines in the first place.

The players of 'Queenio' also cooperate with one another, but their improvisatory decision-makings are less 'performative' and more strategically intended to 'fool' one player who tries to outdo the others' tricks:

```

      x
      x
      x
      x           x
      x
      x
      x
      x

```

1. One player, A, is given a tennis ball.
2. The other players stand side by side, as close to each other as possible, in a line behind A, hands behind backs.
3. Without looking, A throws the ball towards the line.
4. One of the players in the line picks up the ball and it is concealed somewhere along the line.
5. The line now calls in unison: 'Queenio Queenio who's got the ballio?'
6. A turns round to face the line and tries to guess who is concealing the ball.
7. A can ask up to three players at a time to move about, with instructions such as 'Put out your hands; turn around; jump up and down' and so on.
8. The players in the line can pass the ball along, making sure that A does not notice them do so.
9. A may not touch any of the other players. (p. 45)

The players do not pre-plan how they will conceal the tennis ball, which means that their overt actions entirely reflect the



'present' situation of exactly who has the tennis ball and who are called upon by the player 'A'. Each player has to sense the other players' movements and intentions without transacting any verbal communications, and she herself in turn tries to convey her intentions by sending a non-verbal, physical signal to the other players. These actions have to be quick and decisive, while they cannot be obvious to 'A'. At the same time, the players might try to 'fake' some actions which are deliberately intended to draw 'A''s attention to a false player. Since no one knows beforehand who will get the tennis ball, such 'fake' actions also have to be improvised on the spot among some of the players, which requires as much mental and physical sensitivities towards the other players. Furthermore, 'real' actions may look 'fake' actions if the players cunningly mix various movements. The game offers situations for complex improvisatory actions.

#### 6.4.2 From Augusto Boal, Games for Actors and Non-Actors

Boal defines the term 'exercise' and the term 'game' for the benefit of the reader of Games for Actors and Non-Actors. While both terms point to achieving efficiency and effectiveness in the movements of a performer's body, a performer in action has a frame of mind and also a frame of bodywork which alter as she switches from engaging in an exercise to engaging in a game, or vice versa. Exercises according to Boal are conducted so that a performer will have a thorough understanding of her body.<sup>17</sup>

Through exercises, a performer will be brought to pay attention to her body's physiological aspects as much as her physical and mental sensitivities allows her. An exercise in Boal's words is

like a 'monologue', an 'introversion' (p. 60). Games shift the focus to 'expressivity of the body' (p. 60), which means that a performer now facilitates her mental and physical abilities in the presence of other people, for the sake of communication. A game is a 'dialogue', an 'extroversion' (p. 60). Having thus stated, Boal notes that exercises and games tend to overlap with each other and that the use of separate terms may basically be a matter of 'didactic intent' (p. 60). Here we find a merging point of Boal's definitions and Kirby's aforementioned definitions.

The exercises and games introduced by Boal to some extent correspond to those taken up by Poulter. Here we will cite two games which grow out of children's games into more performance-conscious, 'theatrical' games.

Among the 'image games' (p. 130) we find a game in which players are expected to 'complete the image' (p. 130):

Everyone gets into pairs and starts with a frozen image of a handshake. One partner removes himself from the image, leaving the other with his hand extended. Now what is the story? Instead of saying what he thinks this new image means, the partner who has gone out returns to the image and completes the image, thus showing what he sees as a possible meaning for it; he puts himself in a different position, with a different relationship to the partner with the outstretched hand, changing the meaning of the image.

Then the first partner comes out of this new frozen image, looks at it, and completes it, changing its meaning again. And so on, each partner alternating. The players should look quickly at the half-image they are completing, arranging themselves in a complementary position as fast as they can; like the modelling exercises, the actors should think with their bodies. It does not matter if there is no literal meaning to the way an actor chooses to complete the image -- the important thing is to keep the game moving and the ideas flowing. (pp. 130-31)

The players keep up with a certain rhythm in completing the image



and in alternating the role of completing the image, which reduces time for mental reflection or planning and instead encourages a body-oriented thinking. At the same time, unlike 'Machine' above, in which each player can make a 'mechanical' movement and can call it a part of a machine, the player who completes the image in this game will not simply add to the half-image of the other player but create a certain 'meaning', literal or not, every time her turn comes. This requires more thinking in the sense that a player has to generate a new, creative 'idea' while making an overt, physical movement. Such blending of mental and physical functions within a performer culminates in a specific, bodily 'showing' of the performer's decision, which altogether makes a comprehensive case for our second category of improvisation.

Another game which requires a performer's mental as well as physical agility and sensitivity is developed from the concept of 'mask':

An actor starts talking and moving around normally, while the others try to capture and reproduce his mask. It is important not to caricature, but to reproduce the inner force which drives the actor to be as he is. The actors imitate the 'master', but imitation in the sense of the word as defined by Aristotle: trying not merely to copy appearances, but to reproduce the inner creative forces which produce these appearances. For instance, one actor's visible characteristics included extreme volubility; in reality he was a timid person, unsure of himself, a person who sought self-assurance by talking non-stop, as he was afraid others might attack him. The actor must create the fear impelling this excess verbosity. Moreover he must discover in the other person the social rituals which have prompted him to be victim to this fear. The foundation of the mask is always a social necessity determined by rituals. (p. 139)

The game tests a performer's sensitivity in observing the behaviour of another person and also tests a performer's ability

to re-generate another person's 'being' from within the performer's self. The 'imitator' does not have much time to figure out the nature of the other person. She promptly has to detect the nature of the mask the other person is wearing and then look through the mask into the 'inner' part of the other person. What is required of a performer in such observations has much to do with experience as well as acute sensitivity towards other people's behaviour. A performer then tries to show what she has observed, which in effect reveals how she facilitates her mind and body in the manner she wants, and her improvisatory agility is now put to test. Like 'complete the image', this game demands a performer's complex mental and physical coordination.

#### 6.5 Dance

The term 'dance' arguably spreads so thin that it will cover, if so required, any overt action shown by a human being. Such use of the term 'dance' confirms that we have, in the course of performance history, shifted the focus of our attention from the observation of forms, of patterns, and of rhythms which are handed down, are learned, and are developed by a leading choreographer, to the recognition of the situation and the condition surrounding those overt actions. Pointing out that 'the ethnocentrically European term "dance" is not applicable to systems of structured human body movement of non-European peoples, who have their own terms of reference for conceiving of such activities',<sup>18</sup> Georgiana Gore indicates the 'content-



dependent' (p. 59) nature of 'dance'. We thus are led to accept what a 'dancer' has to say about her definition of 'dance' and about her performance, which means that some of the 'dances' are called by that name only because the performers call them dances. 'Dance' manifests a phenomenological point of view towards a performing 'body', particularly in the sense that a decision-making performer comes in the centre of discussion. Sally Banes also mentions 'context':

In general, whether one is speaking about art dance or social dance, the context of the event in which the movement is situated is more salient than the nature of the movement itself in determining whether the action is dance. 19

The context may be agreed upon among the performers and the audience alike, with little explanation needed, based on a shared tradition. On the other hand, we can also create a new, desired context for ourselves, foregrounded by which our performance becomes a 'dance'. In Bane's words, 'dance can consist of movement organized poetically, familiar movements made strange by virtue of a new context' (p. 239).

Here in this section of the chapter we will take up the field of 'dance' primarily from a viewpoint similar to those of Gore or Banes. We will not pre-define the ranges to be covered but will adhere to the principle notion of 'dance' as a performer's body making overt actions in circumstances which may differ widely from one performance piece to another. According to our categorisation of improvisation, 'dance' in such a sense particularly relates to the second and the third categories. Strictly 'choreographed' performances, in which a mistake is a

mistake whether deftly improvised or not, are regarded as a thesis to be reacted against by the performers engaging in such dance pieces as those described by Banes. To appreciate the relationship between improvisation and dance fully, we first briefly overview a change that has taken place in the concept and practice of 'dance' in the course of dance history in the West.

#### 6.5.1 Before Cunningham; Cunningham

If we trace the development of 'modern dance' which Banes sums up, we can find in Loïe Fuller, who worked in Paris in the 1890s, a budding concept of the kind of dance in which a dancer is given a certain amount of decision-making role.<sup>20</sup> Fuller apparently intended to show 'individual differences between the ways the dancers moved' (p. 2), which included letting the dancers have 'choices within the present, imagistic fragments she [Fuller] created' (p. 2). This relieves the performers of having to shuttle between a dichotomy of correct and incorrect movements, and their improvisatory options start gaining the status of being an authentic part of a dance-piece itself. Meanwhile, Fuller remained the decision-maker in terms of laying out the principle structure of the piece and its scope of choices. Banes also points out that Fuller 'often used untrained dancers in her works' (p. 2), which may suggest her interest in 'individuals' as alive, human 'bodies'.

Of Isadora Duncan, Banes brings our attention especially to Duncan's 'attitudes' towards dance, which may or may not have been fully shown in her actual 'choreography':



Apparently Duncan's choreography was not improvised, but followed a fixed plan. But surely her charismatic stage presence imbued the spare dances with much of their legendary power. Her ideas about the possibilities of human freedom and personal expression in life, as in dance, her unabashed love for the human body, her rejection of the rigidity imposed by an academic approach to movement -- these attitudes (rather than the actual skeletal choreography that survives) are her most important legacy. (pp. 2-3)

Duncan's quest for 'freedom' and 'personal expression' in dance can partly be deduced from her rather defiant stand against the then mainstream ballet. As Deborah Jowitt explains, Duncan 'railed at what she felt to be the innate inexpressiveness of the ballet vocabulary'.<sup>21</sup> Given that ballet and dance are not to be confused but not to be discussed totally separately either, here we simply note that Duncan saw in ballet not only 'discipline' (p. 170) and 'aristocratic decorum' (p. 170), to use Jowitt's words, but also 'arbitrary choices' (p. 170). Freedom for Duncan then may have a two-fold meaning. First, a performer's body and choreographic directions complement and highlight each other rather than the body being stuck in a choreographic straitjacket. Enveloping this kind of physical, expressive freedom, there is a freedom which defies the hierarchical superiority of the tradition and rules of the then ballet as a whole. Duncan's charisma was apparently needed if such freedom was to be attempted, and we also realise that Duncan was a powerful decision-maker while being a possible emancipator. In other words, Duncan's decision-makings were at the same time the revelation of her whole bodywork. Whether her movements were improvised or not almost ceases to be the issue, since her bodily presence presumably surpassed specific 'choreographies'.

Jowitt asserts that we can 'link' Martha Graham's works with Expressionism in art, the dancer being influenced by the wave of 'movement' in art.<sup>22</sup> If 'freedom' in Duncan's sense is to be associated with Expressionism, dancers like Graham may indeed be Expressionists in that their works pursue certain 'subjectivity' (p. 171). Meanwhile, Jowitt carefully points out that those dancers' subjectivity seemed to take a course which was slightly different from the course taken by what Jowitt describes as the Expressionism movement as a whole (p. 171). This especially concerns the fact that Graham and others apparently had no 'mystical' idea (p. 171) when they regarded their bodies as a 'medium' (p. 172) and as the subject/object of their creation. Those dancers saw 'the actuality of the human body' (p. 172), which implies a quite practical view towards the body's physiology and its relationship with the mind. Nevertheless, such an attitude did not stop Graham and others from personally embodying choreography simply by their dominant presence (p. 172). In Jowitt's words, the dancers' 'very skeletons seemed melted out of shape by the heat of their passions' (p. 172). Like Duncan, Graham's ultimate aim was to free 'individual' (p. 172) performers from the kind of restrictions which, to Graham as well as to Duncan, hampered a smooth, straightforward relationship between performers' mind and body. If a dancer is passionate, then, she may as well end up 'melting' her choreography. One of Graham's works, Lamentation, aptly shows her 'freedom' in expression:

[. . .] Graham's body, encased in a taut tube of stretch jersey, is all jutting angles straining against the cloth or protruding



from its open ends -- knees, elbows, hands with fingers pressed together, clubbed feet. The few moments of symmetry stand out against moments when the seated body is rocked off balance, distorted by the externalization of inner pressure. (p. 172)

According to Jowitt, Graham's performance was not a 'mime' of her 'emotion' (p. 172), which suggests that she was free from feeling obliged to convey any meanings through conventional signifying functions of a human body. We can say that Graham pursued individual freedom in expressing her 'feelings', always turning to the body as the ultimate and the only object to realise her will, which in turn made the body the subject of her feelings, too. So far, as in the case of Duncan, Graham may be regarded as a creator of an overt action called 'dance', which goes beyond specific boundaries of choreography and which also pushes the question of improvisatory aspects aside as being almost irrelevant. However, as Jowitt points out, once Graham's individual feelings and her bodily actions start to gain some value worthy of being handed down to other dancers (pp. 172-73), it is no longer her dancing 'being' that matters crucially but it is the 'codifi[cation]' (p. 172) of her 'being' that is important. Codification at the same time induces the building of 'narrative' in performances (p. 172). At this stage of her career, then, we might say that Graham was working on the basis of core principles, which indeed were her passions and feelings but which often had to be judged against their enactment by other dancers. Codification also formed a piece of work, a detached and completed performance material, which brought about the question of correctness and mistakes.

Merce Cunningham follows the line of Duncan and Graham,

especially in terms of putting his individual visions or beliefs into action and ending up with a piece which defies existent rules and conventions in ballet/dance. Cunningham differs most distinctly from Graham in that 'freedom' for Cunningham seems to mean a freedom of the performer's body from the performer's 'feelings', or passions as in Graham's sense. We might be able to see a connection between the later stage of Graham's work with its codification of 'dance' and the fact that Cunningham used to dance with the Graham dancers before setting off a career of his own. Jowitt notes that Cunningham's movements are not, as popularly believed, pure movements: 'Remarkable duet passages, such as those that Cunningham in earlier days performed with Carolyn Brown, reveal through elegant, unusual movement ineffable truths about men and women together, truths more profound than emanate from many pas de deux intentionally cast as romances' (p. 174). This, however, more concerns how the viewers of Cunningham's works will interpret what they see, which often needs its own framework for discussion. To focus on the performers' side of 'dance', we find a certain consistency within Cunningham's practice and his 'freedom' as Roger Copeland explains:

It may seem ironic that Cunningham could be simultaneously attracted to compositional strategies based on chance and to a movement vocabulary markedly more balletic than Martha Graham's. But for Cunningham, chance and the ballet vocabulary are two means towards the same end: they liberate the choreographer from the limitations of his instincts. 23

In order to pursue 'freedom' in such sense, Cunningham apparently puts more emphasis than others do on preparing the body to be



fully flexible and be ready for any command. In an attempt to achieve that, Cunningham takes up various ballet/dance methods and traditions without worrying excessively about existent divisions among them. Meanwhile, if we read what Banes writes about him, it is clear that Cunningham continues to find discipline important and crucial to his whole concept of dance, the kind of discipline which moulds 'technique'. This seems to suggest that a performer's body to Cunningham will be free not for the freedom's sake but rather for the practical purpose of making the body more overtly, subtly, and distinctively moveable. Banes points to the fact that:

Unlike the post-modern choreographers, inspired by Cunningham's ideas or critical of his method, who would carry his theories further, however, Cunningham remains entrenched in a dance-technical idiom. It is an idiom that he invented, combining the elegant carriage and brilliant footwork of ballet with the flexibility of the spine and arms practiced by Graham and her contemporaries. 24

We might thus say that while his performance presents itself against the grain of traditional ballet/dance performances, Cunningham firmly retains his presence as a choreographer who will be the ultimate rule-maker and disciplinarian as to how a performer should move her body. The overt actions of Cunningham and his dancers are likely to encompass the first and the third categories which we have set in this chapter. Cunningham as a decision-maker seems to be, as several people note, quite thorough in ensuring precise movements on the performers' part, which consequently leaves little room for improvisatory freedom. This has much to do with how exactly Cunningham makes decisions

and connects the decided-upon factors to the actual movements of a performer's body. As already mentioned before, Cunningham often turns to chance-operational means in order to make decisions.

Cunningham explains the work called Torse, about which he first states, 'I figured out the phrasing and the continuity ahead of time, before the dancers came to rehearsal. Not, of course, the way they would dance the phrases, but the phrases themselves'.<sup>25</sup> Such pre-planning does imply a deeply mind-oriented approach towards making a performance, and yet in Cunningham's case the body is both the means as well as the target of exercising his intelligence. We might even say that every detail of Cunningham's mind-work will materialise physically. The fact that his planning of Torse heavily relies on chance seems to complicate our attempt to clarify Cunningham's approach since we primarily consider chance a preventive measure against exercising one's mind. Nevertheless, the very reason for his using chance will be clear once we realise that such a decisive framework is needed in order to actually enhance the precision of decision-making, which is not performers' but Cunningham's own. 'Decisions' and 'body movements' are both insulated, by means of chance, from what would make them too opaque and complicated to be handled objectively, such as a performer's intense 'passion'. The way Cunningham applies chance operative means to the body-work in Torse almost seems constructing a meticulous set of codes:

There are sixty-four phrases, because that's the number of hexagrams in the I Ching. The phrases are formed like the



numbers themselves. For example, one has one part in it, two has two, three has three, up to sixty-four. But I didn't make it as though one were one rhythmic beat, and so forth, metrically. Let us take the second phrase, it will be clearer. The counts are related to weight changes. That is, if you stand on your foot, that's one; if you bend your knee, that's a weight change, so that's two. Now that could be done slowly or quickly. At sixty-four, you have sixty-four weight changes. [. . .] That was for the sixty-four movement phrases. But then you take the space and you have a similar process. I numbered the space with sixty-four squares, eight by eight. Then I used the I Ching as it comes out [. . .]. Then I would toss to see how many people did each phrase among the men, the women or both. Gradually all the combinations would come out and I would see them more and more clearly and try them out. (pp. 20-21)

At first glance, breaking up the body-movement into 'phrases' seems an intentional attempt to treat a performer's body as a complex set of components whose combinations would determine the whole nature of the dance-piece. It might lead us to think that all the movements of Torse result from an exclusive and pure cooperation between the body as a physical entity and the laws of nature. Only when questions such as the probability of finding improvisatory aspects in Torse are asked do we start seeing a human decision-maker, who in this case has to be extremely powerful so that she can actually follow through the whole idea of 'phrases' effectively. Here, 'decisions' refer to every bit of disciplinary instructions, corrections, and supervisions which have the sole purpose of ensuring the absolute 'freedom' of the body from all factors except the chosen means of chance. A decision-maker's job is to let no improvisatory actions disrupt the entire concept of the dance-piece, in other words, to inhibit improvisation in the course of the performance. For the performers, whether they happen to be decision-makers or not, chance operation produces a set of rules which would be either

followed or flouted, no room in between. Rules are not used as backbone principles but rather as the only principles available, which by themselves directly constitute the entire structure of the work. Asserting that such a use of chance will 'avoid what might otherwise "flow" in an organic way',<sup>26</sup> Copeland sums up Cunningham's choreography by saying, 'it does not come naturally to the human body' (p. 192). We, on the other hand, can say that Cunningham's idea of 'freedom' resides precisely in such unnatural physical actions, since a human performer's instinctive feeling as to what is natural and what is unnatural seems to be exactly what Cunningham intends to leave behind. If human improvisatory actions have much to do with a smooth relationship between body and mind, they are in effect revelations of what the mind finds 'natural' for the body to do or what the body does being regarded by the mind as 'natural' movements, which fundamentally contradicts the whole concept envisioned by Cunningham.

Given all these, we cannot ignore some of the dances choreographed by Cunningham, in which certain decision-makings by the performers seem to hinge on improvisatory decisions, at least in a limited sense. Cunningham, who states that 'try[ing]' out the chance 'physically' among the dancers is 'the crucial moment',<sup>27</sup> regards the actual moment of body in action as an occasion which is more than the chances being carried out flawlessly. For all the efforts being put to perfect the chance operation in dance, he nevertheless considers performers' performing moments second to none in terms of making a 'dance'. On the basis of Cunningham's attitude towards the performing



moment, then, it does not surprise us to find pieces, for example, Second Hand, in which the performers are required to choose some particular movement among a limited number of choices at the moment of performing it. This is not exactly the kind of decision-making coming out of an instinctive mental/physical coordination, which results in what a performer herself could not have foreseen exactly. Second Hand is explained by Cunningham:

Certain details can contribute to phrasing movement. You can amplify a phrase by very small movements that don't need to be evident for them to be effective. For example, in a dance called Second Hand made to Erik Satie's Socrate, I gave each dancer a certain number of different hand gestures which could be done in any order. Throughout the length of the third movement each dancer could make a choice about which one of those hand gestures he wanted to use. They were small things like finger signs, hands closed or opened; the dancer could hold them or change them as he wanted to in relation to some other movement he was doing. [. . .] All these gestures were almost unnoticeable in the dance because they are small and they may be held only briefly. Each dancer had twenty changes of hand shapes; they did not have to use them all. I did ask them to keep the same order each time, I think, although perhaps I didn't even do that. (p. 87)

In this dance, Cunningham continues to be the ultimate decision-maker, only that he decides to provide his dancers with several choices, each of which has determined contents, namely, gestures. The dancers thus cannot improvise on gestures themselves, but they can decide on the whole sequence of gestures as they perform. Arranging the sequence can be done heuristically in the course of a rehearsal when performers try out various gestures in accordance with the movements in other parts of their bodies. Such a way of making decisions is one answer to placing a performer's body and her physical movements at the centre, that is, cherishing the 'moment' of moving her body over any other

factors in this particular dance-piece. The 'moment' of making physical movements can also be experienced by those same performers while they are performing the piece in a publicly-presentable form, that is, in a form which is complete apart from a few choices to be made. The performers' decision-making is influenced by the condition of their mind and body at the moment when they make choices. Nonetheless, the fact that Second Hand leaves choices for the performers only in the range of 'almost unnoticeable' hand gestures seems to imply that improvisation in this piece can hardly be regarded as a vital element which will form part of the backbone of the dance. Rather, the improvisatory aspects in Second Hand may have been intended as part of the technique to polish a performer's flexibility further, in this case, in the movement of her hands.

#### 6.5.2 Post-Cunningham: An Overview

Banes attributes the significance of performances by people like Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, and Robert Rauschenberg partly to the fact that '[f]rom the time of the first concert', they 'included "choreographers" who were not trained dancers, but artists, composers, and writers'.<sup>28</sup> This, Banes states, derived from the 'informality and flexibility of the workshop' (p. 13). Banes also points out that 'it was not only artists who provided fruitful areas of exchange for choreography. The new dance both simplified itself and complicated itself with technological experiments' (p. 14). We will not discuss 'technological experiments' in particular here but will regard them as some of the means through which the performers 'challenged the range of



purpose, materials, motivations, structures, and styles of dance' (p. 15). These performers are post-Cunningham in the sense that, first, they distinctly follow Cunningham's idea and practice in seeing 'dance' principally as the body in movement and, secondly, they nevertheless challenge Cunningham's and his predecessors' ideas on what defines dance/ballet. Banes describes these two points further. About the continuous flow which is advocated by Cunningham and by the post-Cunningham performers alike Banes writes:

Originally reacting against the expressionism of modern dance, which anchored movement to a literary idea or musical form, the post-modernists propose (as do Cunningham and Balanchine) that the formal qualities of dance might be reason enough for choreography, and that the purpose of making dances might be simply to make a framework within which we look at movement for its own sake. (p. 15)

With such an understanding of the body and its movement rooted firmly in any of their works, the post-Cunningham performers eventually find themselves reaching for a meta-'dance' domain. The domain cannot be described in exact terms; some meta-'dance' qualities may not necessarily be pre-planned or consciously-enacted or intentional, while some of the meta-'dance' territories can be regarded as being extremely well-constructed, organised, and highly intentional. Each dancer/performer will be allowed to pursue her own idea and practice to the extent that the degree and the overtness of any meta aspects will entirely depend on the decisions made by the dancer/performer. Most likely, a performance will keep its specific and practical trend, and yet it also will become rather ambivalent with regard to each performer's attitude towards performance. Banes describes such

ambivalence as follows:

The breakdown of the distinction between art and life [. . .], the clarification of individual, discrete movements, the isolation of the essential characteristics of dance, have all become valid purposes for making a dance. So has the option of making a dance for the pleasure of the dancer, whether or not the spectator finds it pleasing, or even accessible. The very question of what it means to create a dance can generate choreography [. . .]. (p. 16)

Ambivalence produces a performance, which does not necessarily solve the 'problem' but at least makes the very nature of ambivalence overt, and this means a great deal to a performer who seeks after some kind of physical as well as mental experience in ambivalence. If in Cunningham what we might call improvisatory aspects are likely to be used as part of the performers' technique, among post-Cunningham performers they do not always coincide with technique: technique is no longer to be defined clearly by those performers in the first place. For post-Cunningham performers, experiencing such an ambivalent circumstance in their own specific way proves to be a most intense 'moment' of performance.

### 6.5.3 The Grand Union

The Grand Union, founded by performers including Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, and Yvonne Rainer,<sup>29</sup> will be looked at here as one of the post-Cunningham practising 'groups'. Susan Foster gives us a general perspective on how the Grand Union performers existed in the performing space, but at the same time she points out that the performers were independent from one another in their whole attitudes towards the shared



performance piece:

For the most part, the Grand Union's performers were presented in gymnasiums, galleries, or churches which afforded a theatre-in-the-round viewing situation with a casual, makeshift atmosphere. Often, viewers entered to find the dancers already moving around: warming up, talking with one another, or arranging various props to be used that evening. The dancers' activity gradually evolved into the performance itself, although no specific beginning was announced. During the performance, dancers occasionally moved out into the seating area, and frequently addressed the audience directly. [. . .] Dancers carried out independent activities -- practicing a movement phrase, stretching, twirling a rope, carrying a ladder, or manipulating any of the mundane items scattered throughout the space. Sometimes they coalesced into duets or trios, uniting briefly, then returning to their individual pursuits. Occasionally a small group would persist in collaborating, proposing various structures for their heretofore unrelated activities. 30

Unlike Cunningham, the performers of the Grand Union did not even seem to consider 'performance' an opportunity to show their movements, let alone their technique. This does not mean that the performers did not take movements seriously or that they did not have technique. The Grand Union performers apparently saw the purpose of their performance in 'an instant-to-instant,  
31  
personal, additive experience', which they allowed the audience to observe and sometimes to have direct contact with, but which fundamentally reflected quite self-consciously on the performers' own perception, or their own senses, rather than on a collective performer-audience experience.

In the course of following her personal sense of experience, each performer may possibly have believed that she was moving according to her own personal 'directions'. Such directions  
32  
nevertheless were too 'elastic' in the Grand Union to sustain or be consistent. This indicates that neither a performer's body nor her mind was to show any distinctive difference between

improvisation and non-improvisation within the piece. It seems that we have no choice but to take the whole developing process-cum-performance of the Grand Union and call it improvisation in one scoop. In that sense, the Grand Union's improvisation falls in our third category.

Given all this, we also find that there existed improvisation in another sense in a Grand Union production. Once we start looking further into what performers and critics say about the Grand Union, we are made aware of the fact that there indeed was improvisation in its narrower sense of the term. When we read Foster describing improvisation in the Grand Union, we notice the word 'choreograph' being used to explain what the Grand Union performers did during the moment of performance. According to Foster, choreography itself in this case refers to the performers' improvisation, and yet Foster's description clearly implies that choreography consists of a certain principle and improvisation:

Another feature of major importance was improvisation; that is, the dancers choreographed the dances as they performed them. Members of the company did share a knowledge of certain movements and phrases, material from previous performances, general aesthetic predispositions concerning matters of style, syntax, and the use of props and music, not to mention assumptions about what constituted an appropriate performance. They did not, however, know precisely what they would do at any given moment during the performance. Thus their work was imbued with a spontaneity and openness unknown in any prior tradition. 33

Despite the fact that individuality among the performers was strongly propelled in the Grand Union, the performers nonetheless had a mutual stock of knowledge and technique which they could trace back without much difficulty at any moment during the



current performance session. Foster implies that the performers did not have to openly consult one another in search of this 'shared' stock. They felt for one another's movement while making individual actions respectively, which altogether led the performance piece as a whole. Improvisation in this case emerged from the performers' common background and their understanding of the ability of one another as performers, in which sense we might include it in our second category of improvisation. If we call these shared elements a 'principle', we have to realise that the Grand Union's very purpose of putting on their pieces did not let such principle be firmly consolidated. That is exactly why there was a possibility of producing a performance which 'failed' from a traditional dance-movement point of view, as Foster notes: 'Sometimes the dancers' conflicting intentions collided, producing a confused disorder. Inevitably, the process also gave rise to long periods of boring inactivity' (p. 54). To us, such possible inactivity conversely confirms that the Grand Union lacked a commanding choreographer who would pull everyone together and avoid this kind of 'failure'. Paxton states:

The totally improvisational company that the Grand Union unintentionally became bypasses the grand game of choreographer and company. [. . .] following or allowing oneself to lead is each member's continual responsibility. The security of pre-set material is only occasionally indulged in, since it seems to get in the way of the amplified self-exploration that arises in improvisatory performance. 34

We may be led to think that loading a choreographer's role on each performer prompted too drastic a vacillation in the performance space and time, but owning such a risk was actually

part of the purpose of performing for the Grand Union performers. Realising that they might 'fail', the performers would concentrate all the more on being individuals and on sharing 'something' with one another at the same time, both of which the performers would willingly put on the line. Improvisation-within-improvisation then might be regarded as the kind of action made possible on the basis of all the performers involved knowing that they shared such risks as well as certain common backgrounds.

The actual performance pieces by the Grand Union described by Paxton reveals that, despite the 'evolving' principle, many of their working-processes were quite systematic in the sense that they seemed to resemble game-playing. Those processes more likely required some kind of choreographers, though they did not dominate among the performers. In the following example by Paxton, Trisha Brown might be regarded as a prompter whose choreography inspired the rest of the performers in such a way that the whole piece looked like an improvisatory attempt on the part of the performers around the initial 'work' by Brown:

Trisha Brown had choreographed a duet in which one person falls like a felled tree, while his partner breaks the fall. As the performers get more daring, they stop alternating the falls, do not stand at a safe close distance to each other, and topple in any direction. Consciously or not, Rainer had a similar falling section in CPAD [Continuous Project Altered Daily] [Yvonne Rainer's group], which David Gordon sees as a model for the subsequent Grand Union sequence. Six performers stand in a small circle and have the options of: continuing to stand, or falling in any direction. If they fall away from the circle, they extend an arm to catch themselves. If several people choose to fall at once, things get complicated, for each faller might not find a catcher; he might be left to fall on the floor. (p. 130)

The Grand Union performances varied, which means that in no way



does the example above represent any standard working-process. Given this, we can still see in this particular piece of performance an improvisatory element characteristic of the Grand Union: the performers had some understanding of where their movements 'originated', in this case Brown's choreography, but at the same time they were actually living the 'moment' filled with dangers and possible disasters not only in terms of their physical safety but in terms of the performance moving forward in space and time. The presence of a choreographer did not change the very basis of what the Grand Union stood for. In the above example, performers were 'instinctively' aware of potential risks, which tells us that their handling of risks also depended on instinctive tactfulness rather than on the kind of tactfulness we would find in a well-planned performance:

[. . .] the eyes learn to judge more acutely, the skin becomes hypersensitive to qualities of touch, particularly the arms; timing in the arc of the topple becomes a game in which you trust as long as your nerves allow, pushing your limits. Understanding where another's focus is becomes easy since it is instinctive. It is also crucial to safety and to communication. (p. 130)

Choreography in the Grand Union was not intended to be learned and pursued by the performers. It only functioned to gather more than one performer in a certain framework and to let them work on their 'evolving' performance without spreading too many ideas too thin. Improvising on such a ground could not have easily stood out as clearly as in the case of many of the game-playing practices. Rather, improvisation seemed to reside in each performer's moment-to-moment sense of uncertainty, which a performer would 'instinctively' control.

It was only when the Grand Union performers started producing 'repertories' that we begin to find improvisation in the distinct principle-variation sense, the kind of actions to be included unmistakably in our second category of improvisation. On 'repertory' within the Grand Union, Paxton states:

The Grand Union members, while gaining confidence in their powers of invention in performance, have kept some of the best 'bits'. What is termed 'improvisational repertory' has been created. This repertory, a first step on the scale toward set forms, recurs exactly or with variations. The unpredictable in group is: Who will pick up the signs and what version of the original will they play? The members slip in and out of the elastic structures, often playing as much on the levels of mutual understanding as on the original form. This understanding of others' mental and physical beings is the result of countless rehearsals, parties, and late-night recaps of performances over the years. (p. 131)

We can see from the above that even in a 'repertory' piece the performers had a strong inclination to rely on their instincts, which suggests their preference for a once-only 'experience'. Improvisation for the Grand Union performers did not have evaluational consequences. There were no definite 'mistakes' or 'corrections'. Improvisation instead had to do with the performers' personal as well as collective sensitivity towards their conscious or subconscious drives and how they were actually collaborating.

#### 6.5.4 Contact Improvisation

We already discussed contact improvisation mainly from the viewpoint of mind-body relationship, which leaves us with the task of looking more generally at what the performing pair overtly 'do' to make a performance piece.



Since the vital element of contact improvisation lies in the fact that performers basically build up the whole sequence only by making 'contacts', our concern will be in what sense those 'contacts' can be called improvisatory actions. Contact improvisation seems to be an extract of the more inclusive Grand Union works if we choose to focus particularly on the collaborative aspect of the Grand Union. Always performing in a pair, a contact improvisation performer is even more strongly pulled by her partner's instincts on how to make the next move. Despite the non-existence of a model or an ideal piece of contact improvisation, the performers apparently are driven by the unwritten rule that it is 'better' to avoid a poorly rhythmical performance or a very 'dull'-looking performance. In Paxton's words, the performers consciously or subconsciously understand that their 'framework' is set when their 'muscular tone is lightly stretched to extend the limbs, although not to a degree that obscures the sensations of momentum and inertia'.<sup>35</sup> Around this 'framework' the performers make 'contacts'. If we further infer from Paxton's comments, the performers having such a 'framework' in view suggests that they actually harbour somewhere in their mind or their body an ideal way of making movements. Instead of referring to an ideal piece of contact improvisation, the 'ideal' in this case describes the performers' feelings, or more precisely, the kind of movements that makes the performers feel charged in mind and body. As Paxton states, the performers seem to 'hold to the ideal of active, reflexive, harmonic, spontaneous, mutual forms' (p. 40), which 'creates the attitude, which is manifest in the quality of energy-use' (p. 40). While

improvisatory aspects in contact improvisation have no choreographic lines to follow, 'framework' and 'ideal' as part of performers' feelings indeed constitute a principle, which makes it easier for the performers to improvise.

Contact improvisation may be put closer to Cunningham since, compared to the more general Grand Union works, contact improvisation has a selected means of expression, namely, the physical 'contact', which, like Cunningham, concentrates on the body and its movement. Nevertheless, it seems that Cunningham and the performers of contact improvisation try to 'free' their bodies in completely opposite ways. In Cunningham, the body moves according to the directions which supposedly have not undergone any specifically manipulative interventions by a human decision-maker. In contact improvisation, the ideal bodily movements are those which precisely materialise a human decision-maker's instincts.

As we have seen so far, trial-and-error approaches are vital elements of what we regard as an improvisatory performance. 'Instincts' in effect call for such approaches. In contact improvisation, a trial-and-error approach in itself becomes a performance piece; trials and errors mainly concern 'touch[ing]' and 'balanc[ing]', to cite Paxton's words:

The partners in the duet touch each other a lot, and it is through touching that the information about each other's movement is transmitted. They touch the floor, and there is emphasis on constant awareness of gravity. They touch themselves, internally, and a concentration is maintained upon the whole body. Balance is not defined by stretching along the center columns of the body, as in traditional dancing, but by the body's relationship to that part which is a useful fulcrum, since in this work a body may as often be on head as feet and relative to



the partner as often as to the floor. (p. 40)

This is when the performers' instinctive search for an ideal improvisation overtly shows. Their touching and balancing retain a certain sobriety which keeps the whole performance on track. At the same time, the sobriety has much to do with making the performance 'pleasantly' harmonious, that is, mixing aggression with subsidence, or sprightness with calmness, which all beat to a certain rhythm taken up by the performers. Improvising some movements so that the performance will keep up such a rhythmic quality means that the performers are actually quite constrained in the choice of their next movement. They are not pressured to move according to tight directions, but they know, or feel, what kind of movement they should avoid and what they can try from moment to moment. Paxton asserts that we can even see a pattern of movements showing the performers' instinctive desire to blend various actions. 'Formulas', as Paxton calls the pattern, are:

Ad & Pr  
 Ad & Ar  
 Pd & Ar  
 Pd & Pr  
 Ar & Ar  
 Ad & Ad [A=active, P=passive, d=demand, r=response]

Pd & Pr tends to become A & (A or P) because the contact is broken or degenerated by double passivity. Ad & Ar tends to become P & (Ar or Ad) as a habitual way out of a glandular stymie when the aim remains contact. Ad & Ad can be a fascinating form. Trying to step around someone to their left when they are trying to pass you to your right can result in a reflexive series Ad & Ad, Ad & Ad . . . , and into Pr & Pr, Pr & Pr, Ad & Ad, . . . [. . .] Beginners tend to lapse into one form and stay for seconds on end. Neither person is bound to be active or passive for very long, and it is desirable to have the intelligence and freedom to choose which mode is appropriate to the ongoing improvisation. (pp. 40-41)

The point is, the performers of contact improvisation seem to be able to grasp this kind of pattern while performing, without always realising that they are grasping it or that their movements can indeed be drawn up schematically, if rather roughly. We may be able to include contact improvisation in the second category of our criteria, which is to say that 'improvisation' in contact improvisation does have principles, if not 'rules' as in games. At the same time we can put contact improvisation in the third category as well, mainly because principles in contact improvisation will have no 'goal' other than leading the performers to make the 'best' contacts that they can afford. Judging what the 'best' is in this case mostly depends on how the performers themselves feel about their actions, which can hardly be moulded into a traditional sense of 'principles'.

Banes mentions that training is important in contact improvisation, though, unlike the training in Cunningham's productions, the contact improvisation performers have trainings in order to sharpen their instinctive feelings for a lively performance:

[. . .] a minimal technical program trains one to develop the muscles to facilitate stretching, centering, taking weight, and increasing joint action. The training also aids consciousness of certain principles: sensing time, orienting oneself to space and to one's partner, discovering attitude, expanding peripheral vision. It takes about a week of working three hours a day to learn the basic methods. 36

We can infer from the above that the training mostly concerns a performer's physical dexterity or flexibility, her sensitivity towards space and time, and her general perspective of creating a



performance piece. All these can be said of the Grand Union works, too, only here in contact improvisation the training seems to be much more deductive. Whereas in the Grand Union performances we cannot always define 'technique', in contact improvisation the trained performers actually apply what they have prepared physically and mentally through a highly specific channel of 'contact'-making. In other words, when we encounter the terms such as 'technique' and 'methods' in contact improvisation, we may regard their meanings not as the acquirement of certain sequential movements but as the very basic ability to move in whatever way the performers' instincts dictate. Given this, we once again hesitate to put contact improvisation exclusively in our second category per se. The gist of contact improvisation seems to lie in its principles which are not to be identified beyond the level of self-disciplined instincts.

#### 6.5.5 Yvonne Rainer

Rainer's Trio A is a landmark piece, asserts Banes, which draws on the hitherto unexplored area of 'dance' as a possible 'object' being 'presented':

The history of dance theory has been the repeated conflict between those who value technique and those who value expression. Those who followed Rameau and those who followed Lully at the turn of the eighteenth century, [. . .] the Cunninghamites and the Grahamites -- all these conflicts have pitted technique against expression in cycles for centuries. With Rainer's Trio A the cycle is at least broken. The debate is made irrelevant. The possibility is proposed that dance is neither perfection of technique nor of expression, but quite something else -- the presentation of objects in themselves. 37

This brings us back to the beginning of the chapter, where we have touched upon the phenomenology of a performer's existence, or her presence, at the moment of performance. To performers like Rainer, 'dance' can now refer to a performer's being itself. Such being has only to be 'presented' in an appropriate context, which allows the 'being' to become a dance piece. In most cases, a performer does not simply 'present' herself by quietly being present in space and time. Here in Trio A the appropriate context deliberately reacts against the traditional rules of ballet and dance, which conversely implies that the context of Trio A is in fact rather narrowly set. By defying or rejecting or deviating from the tradition, the performer herself at least knows what she is doing, which centres around the view that 'neither technique nor expression' should necessarily be her carefully-intended purpose of performing. As we may infer from Banes, Trio A is an antithesis of the dance-works that came before it and therefore is more than a mere forefronting of a physical presence of the performer:

Without entirely restricting post-modern dance to the rigid categories suggested by the chart, she notes the salient points of divergence with conventional dance aesthetics. [. . .] Yet at the same time Rainer operated dialectically in making Trio A, in regard to dance technique if not style or structure. Violating nearly every canon of classic dance conventions (both ballet and modern), she brought classical lines and gestures into conflict with their own subversions, to create an entirely new mode of dance. After Trio A, the choreographic terrain looked different. The boundaries of dance had burst open. Certain actions, certain postures, certain attitudes now became possible, and eventually familiar, parts of the vocabulary. (p. 44)

The 'being' is presented under the rules set by Rainer. The rules 'burst open' the previously accepted concepts in the



'dance' field, which makes Rainer's work quite unique and idiosyncratic until her rules start to develop among the other performers and groups. Improvisation can hardly be an issue other than the fact that as a human performer Rainer certainly has to let her body respond to whatever circumstances each moment of a performance offers. Beyond such a minute, physiological level, we have no way of pinning down any single action as being improvisatory. No one except Rainer is thoroughly familiar with the rules she has made for Trio A, and without such knowledge it is difficult to discuss improvisation analytically. We may be able to take up the issue of improvisatory aspects within the work when the piece has been performed a number of times and been explained by the performer herself as to the concept and the purpose behind it.

Turning to some of the other works by Rainer, we find a piece entitled Some Thoughts on Improvisation. Rainer describes this particular 'dance' as: '[a]n improvised solo with a spool of white thread, it had a taped reading of an essay I had written after dancing at the Green Gallery during an event by the artist James Lee Byars'.<sup>38</sup> Questions on improvisation thus run in parallel to one another in this piece, one stream having to do with any physical improvisatory action involving 'a spool of white thread', the other with the verbal message on improvisation. Such a message quite openly brings an important part of the structural framework of Some Thoughts on Improvisation to the level of metaphysics, though Rainer seems to stress the piece's 'physical' side just as strongly. Her 'essay' reads more like a personal note on what she as a

performer goes through mentally and physically when improvising than a general assessment of, or her own definition of, what she considers 'improvisation'. For example, Rainer spells out in the 'essay' how she is able to 'connect':

Improvisation, in my way of handling it, demands a constant connection with some thing -- object, action, and/or mood -- in a situation. The more connections are established the easier it is to proceed. The idea of 'more' or 'fewer' connections is related to one's degree of awareness of the total situation, including audience. One definition of a connection is a lifeline from 'it' to me that conducts a flow of stimuli and ideas. (p. 299)

We might be able to regard this kind of 'connection' as what we have so far called in our discussion 'sensitivity'. Rainer here talks about the performer's mind and body functioning in various ways to various extents, which depends on the performer's 'awareness' of an overall perspective of the performance. Similar arguments were discussed in chapter 2, only that what we find here is an argument being presented to the public in the performance, as one of the materials used in the performance, that is, as part of the performance. The tape being played during the performance involves no improvisatory aspects whatsoever, to which extent the 'essay' produces no more improvisation than writings on improvisation do in printed form. The performer instead 'lives' the moment of improvisation by moving with the 'thread', in a sense demonstrating the statement on the tape. We can surmise that the tape playing her 'thoughts on improvisation' contributes to the building-up of a narrowly-focussed 'topic' or 'theme' of the piece. In this untraditional 'dance' with no established 'rules', the tape operates in lieu of



'rules', which let improvisation unfold more easily and more overtly. The framework of the piece thus set openly and specifically, the performer is allowed to move as if she is involved in a loosely guided exercise. She tries to explore her mental and physical dexterity based on her 'thoughts on improvisation', which, though being quite personal a 'rule', are made obvious to everyone, the performer and the audience alike, by means of a taped, verbal address. In this regard, Some Thoughts on Improvisation borders on the second and the third categories of our criteria.

Another of Rainer's works entitled Terrain further projects an experimental side of her performance. Game-like elements in particular are pursued here by Rainer, which look more systematic and gymnastic than the exercise-like aspects found in Some Thoughts on Improvisation. Accordingly, improvisatory possibilities are likely to be materialised in a more overt way against the background of specific rules and directions which the performers follow. Terrain, Rainer writes, is a 'one-and-a-half-hour work in five sections for six people' (p. 13), and the sections are respectively called 'Diagonal', 'Duet', 'Solo Section', 'Play', and 'Bach' (p. 12). Looking at Rainer's description of the rules, we find that the section of 'Diagonal' can possibly provide some moments of improvisation, whereas in the other four sections we hardly detect an overt form of improvisation emerging. The performers move under the circumstances of 'mechanical' rules and conditions, which even remind us of Cunningham:

[Diagonal] consisted of 10 traveling movements to be done by one to six performers (each movement designated by its own number), and 4 traveling movements to be executed by only one or two performers -- each designated by a letter, A, B, C, or D. The directions of travel were limited to two upstage-to-downstage intersecting diagonals drawn corner to corner. (P. 14)

The ten movements for 'one to six performers' vary in their specificity/generality, for example, no. 1 being simply described as 'Walk' or no. 2 as 'Run', whereas no. 6 as 'Triplet run -- left, right -- then backward twin on left en route -- resume triplet to finish' or no. 10 as '4 steps into jump -- left shoulder and hip meeting -- followed by r. leg thrusts forward; step on it, thrust l. leg back and across as r. elbow and shoulder blade jerk back' (p. 28). The four movements for 'one or two performers' are all highly instructional. Rainer, for example, describes the movement 'A' as 'Right arm circles twice as l. leg chasse. 3rd time bring elbow in and thrust r. arm sharply toward corner as turn skip on r. leg. Dribble walk' (p. 28). Each performer in the 'group' is 'obliged to execute the given movement' when the 'signal', either a number or a letter, is called out (p. 14). Thus far, the rules seem too specific and straightforward to allow enough room for the performers' decision-making moments. Terrain, however, is in fact performed in a more complex way with several additional rules overlapping the numbered and lettered movements, and it is when all these rules web together that the performers find themselves in a position to make decisions. Such a moment occurs when 'signals' are called out two at a time, to which each performer is expected to '[follow] whichever one [she] heard more clearly' (p. 14). If we can regard this moment as being improvisatory, it is in the sense that a performer



instinctively adopts one letter or number and drops the other. Forming a 'group' also involves some decision-making on the performers' part. The one who calls out a 'signal' may 'simultaneously grasp the hand of a performer standing near-by, indicating that that person should accompany the "caller"' (p. 14). This is again an instinctive action rather than an intelligent one, which makes maximum use of the performers' right to make decisions at the very moment of performing. On the other hand, if a performer wants to leave a 'group', she deliberately chooses not to call out any number or letter 'but simply execute[s] any one of the designated movements alone and so leave[s] the group' (pp. 14-15). These and other rules all intertwine, including the whole section of 'Diagonal' itself overlapping with another 'game' at the performers' own discretion (p. 15). Diagonal ends up becoming a game which highly depends on what the performers decide from moment to moment while strictly retaining a rigorous menu of rules. The fact that Rainer herself calls 'Diagonal' a 'game' (p. 15) seems to suggest the rule-bound nature of the piece. This is a game which foregrounds the performers' responsibility in their movement: there can be 'mistakes' of failing to follow the complex rules, and yet the performers are also allowed to take the rules in their own hands by making choices at certain moments. In those respects, 'Diagonal' is to be regarded as belonging to both the first and the second categories.

#### 6.5.6 Trisha Brown

Trisha Brown constructively delves into improvisatory

potentialities in 'dance' performance by developing various physical movements which are intended to emancipate the performer's body from the established channels of stimulus and reaction.<sup>39</sup> In a conversation with Yvonne Rainer, Brown makes it clear that her search for more possibilities in improvisation mainly starts with an attempt to find a new, or a hitherto neglected, combination of bodily movements. As Rainer says, such attempts by Brown seem to stem from the source which is inherently physical rather than from the source of conscious ideas:

Rainer: In your dancing, the energy for the beginning of an impulse occurs so suddenly that one thinks that maybe it is about the impulse at the beginning of a phrase, but that isn't right. Rather, the impulse constantly arises from different rhythms and therefore it's unpredictable. 40

Still, Brown also stresses the fact that her search for improvisation is a continuous experiment on 'details':

Brown: There is a kind of democratic distribution throughout the body. I'm always looking for what we've left out -- the backside of the knees, for example. There is an inevitability at work; I set up a tilt and all of the instinctive moves that follow in an improvisational choreographic process give you the base for a phrase which can then be amplified and altered. That's one of my basic tools. I'm constantly altering the meaning of move a by the introduction of move b . . .

Rainer: . . . while a is still going on . . .

Brown: . . . which sets up something that will occur in move f.  
(p. 45)

Much as she leans on body-oriented approaches, Brown nevertheless seems to recognise a factor which actually drives her into such approaches, namely, her desire to '[make] a new dance grammar'



(p. 45), as Rainer puts it. Brown believes, and tries to prove, that a 'new' grammar can only start with new 'details'. Her physical experiment on details thus turns out to be quite intellectual in the sense that part of her purpose is to discover a chink in the 'traditional' armour in the field of 'dance'.

Brown's attempt to nourish various 'rhythms' leads her quite smoothly from experimenting on the physical aspects of an individual performer to creating a performance piece. As we will see, this does not necessarily mean that a performer's physical movement on the one hand and 'dance' as a piece on the other logically precede or follow one another. Granted that a performance has to start somewhere, which in a real situation tends to be either the body or the rules and rarely both, it still seems to be that the body and an overall performance ultimately mean the same in Brown's works. Improvisatory possibilities seem to reveal in different shapes and in different circumstances as Brown goes through changes in her choreographic technique, that is, how tightly she controls the 'rules' she sets up.

Marianne Goldberg traces Brown's performance pieces, in the course of which Goldberg focuses on the question of 'rules' in relation to the kind of 'scores' that Brown uses. 'Brown says', Goldberg notes, 'her creative process occurs at the interface between the movement score and the immediate physical response of the dancers to it'.<sup>41</sup> According to Goldberg, changes in Brown's scores are evident: whereas from the earlier years the scores were 'decipher[able]' (p. 155), in later years they have become 'so complex they are almost impossible to discern' (p. 155). In

Primary Accumulation, performed in 1972, the score still retains a 'mathematical' structure with specific and sequential instructions for the performers (p. 155). Locus, performed in 1975 has a score which gives its 'dancer' a strong existential awareness as to her performing space and her moving self (p. 155). The performer's 'kinesphere' is set 'as a cube defined by 27 points distributed along its sides' (p. 155), and the performer makes 'modular gestures' which are determined by the rule matching gestures with 'points' (p. 155). Consequently, the performer may participate in 'clusters of separate gestures' all performed at the same time (p. 155). From what the score so far suggests, we can say that Locus offers the performer a chance to make improvisatory decisions only on the basis of a meticulous web of spatial and modular rules. This changes radically, as Goldberg states, in Watermotor, performed in 1978, for here Brown leaves the 'mathematical' formula and instead begins to create a piece with her physical improvisatory movements (p. 155). The score in this case comes afterwards (p. 155).

As Goldberg explains, Watermotor turns out to be a watershed for Brown in the sense that she discards what Goldberg calls 'stability' (p. 155), referring to the use of a score as a basis for improvisation, and starts relying more and more on the 'unpredictab[ility]' (p. 155) of the body of the performer. Having always been keen on developing bodily movements in a non-traditional way, Brown's turning-point is never a complete shift of an attitude towards how to create 'dance' but rather the loosening of a control she has had over the structure of her



'dance' pieces as a whole. Improvisation accordingly sees a change, that is, from being an action based on a well-conceived principle to an action which materialises the performer's instinctive drive to make certain movements. With such a change may come a performance that plainly reveals a performer's ambivalence if any, which seems to imply another dimension of Brown's performance. This is described by Goldberg as: '[Brown] also began to cancel out a movement in one direction with a gesture in another, deflecting the viewer's focus with sequences of movements that ricocheted before ever having been firmly established' (p. 155). Improvisation itself becomes a performance piece.

As Brown becomes increasingly instinctive in making her performance, her choreography in effect gets 'more difficult' (p. 157), according to Goldberg. If we can say that an emphasis on individual performers' physical movements themselves implies an overt, phenomenological presence of those performers in space and time, we might then interpret the word 'difficult' not simply in the sense that performers' physical fitness and technique become more demanding but also in the sense that the 'scores' assume once-only, idiosyncratic pictures. In fact, Goldberg leads our attention to the contrary. Although '[p]art of Brown's early interests were in the everyday dynamics of untrained dancers' (p. 157), which we presume smoothly agree with 'mathematical' scores, this does not mean that Brown's later, improvisation-first approaches inevitably abandon 'everyday dynamic' aspects. Goldberg states that 'vestiges of task-like performing remain in the way Brown's dancers today toss off

complex movement without showing off or displaying emotional expressions' (p. 157). Whether actually repeatable or not, Brown's later works at least seem to retain the element which deliberately placates, if not hinder, rampantly improvisatory actions. In this respect, Brown seems to hold on to a principle throughout her search for improvisatory possibilities.

#### 6.5.7 Ann Halprin

In an interview with Yvonne Rainer, Ann Halprin talks about how she and her fellow performers try out improvisation. Halprin has one quite clear reason for pursuing improvisatory approaches when she is in the process of making a performance, and her reason is reminiscent with why Rainer chooses to pursue improvisation. Like Rainer, Halprin seems to be conscious of her strong desire to break some existent 'dance'-rules and traditions, which she attempts in practice by thoroughly exploring improvisatory actions:

I wanted to explore in a particular way breaking down any preconceived notions I had about what dance was, or what movement was, or what composition was. I began setting up situations where we could rely only on our improvisational skills. Everything was done, for quite a few years, with improvisation.  
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With the fundamental questions of 'what dance is', 'what movement is', and 'what composition is' firmly in her mind, Halprin improvises not for 'self-expression' (p. 143) but rather for a breakthrough in going beyond tradition (p. 143). This is why Halprin's performance pieces used to be 'fixed' (p. 144) after they were produced through improvisatory approaches (p. 144).



Granted that she has always regarded improvisation as a tool and also as the material, we find Halprin looking back on the point of her career when she seemed to be determined to complete her creative process, that is, to finish her work and keep it 'fixed'. Her creative process through improvisation during those years may have been highly physical, but that did not seem to change the principle which she then held, namely, a process was a way-through to a certain result. This means that improvisation was not a result in itself:

We would isolate in an anatomical and objective way the body as an instrument. We would improvise with rotation or flexion or other anatomical structures. We would say, we're going to begin to work with how you can articulate this part of the body, isolate it from another part of the body -- what is the efficient way to do that movement, do we really need to do this or is it just habit? [. . .] And we used improvisation to explore space and certain kinds of dynamics. We would set up a situation where two people had a focus that concerned the amount of space between them. They would improvise to get a feeling of what could happen, and what one person did would elicit a reaction in cause and effect. (p. 143)

Here Halprin describes a process of creating her and her group's performance pieces. The performers delve into their own bodies by making quite experimental physical movements. They also make certain that spatial surroundings will be well-grasped, and they adapt to given situations by being readily flexible as well as by working reciprocally with other performers. Such a process, Halprin explains, led to the construction of pieces which 'were completely improvised with particular focuses' (p. 144). Among such focuses were 'voice', that is, Halprin and her colleagues 'began to allow the voice to become an integral part of movement' (p. 144). 'Free-association' (p. 144) of various forms of voice

such as shouting was webbed into a 'dance' piece, which in effect broke a 'dance' tradition (p. 144). Simply put, improvisation at this stage of Halprin's career existed in order to produce tradition-defying results.

Halprin also uses charts, and this is again part of her attempt to find ways to break tradition. By '[taking] every possible anatomical combination of movement and put them all on sheets of paper and [give] them numbers' (p. 145), Halprin has a chance to hit on the combinations which she has missed or has never considered possible (p. 145). Those combinations are then tried by the performer in person and will be developed to form part of a performance piece (p. 145). According to Halprin, the performers still adopt an improvisatory process even when they follow such charts (p. 145), which suggests that the use of charts by the performers is complementary to their physically-oriented improvisatory try-outs. Unlike some choreographers who rely on charts to create unpredictability at the moment of a performance, Halprin says that the movements which have been produced with the help of charts end up in a 'fixed' state of a performance piece (p. 146).

Rainer in the interview reminds Halprin of the time when Halprin adopted 'tasks'. The purpose, Rainer observes, was primarily to 'become aware of your body', that is, 'to do the movement or the kinesthetic thing that the task brought about', which is not always the same as doing the 'assigned' task itself (p. 147). Halprin responds to Rainer's comment by pointing out that she and her colleagues later started to focus more on the



'task itself': 'Then we set up tasks that would be so challenging that the choice of a task would be the idea of the movement' (p. 147). We can surmise that tasks under this circumstance begin to acquire the weight of becoming a performance piece almost by themselves. For example, Halprin talks about 'the wine bottle task' given by Jo Landor, which was 'so challenging and so difficult that I [Halprin] was quite content to do it' (pp. 147-48). This particular task forms part of the piece called Five-Legged Stool, which also features some other performers engaged in tasks such as 'slid[ing] down' a board placed diagonally to the 'ceiling beam' (p. 148). Neither her wine bottle task nor the slide-down-a-board task has a meaning beyond the point that it has to be performed. Apart from the fact that they are in themselves quite demanding on the performers' body, these tasks do not lead to any further developments within the piece. In Halprin's words, the performers who have managed to do the 'impossible' tasks assigned to them can be regarded as having 'arrived at an incredible bit of fantasy' (p. 148), which is to say that they 'simply did something' (p. 148). Here we find that Halprin and her colleagues are pursuing a process of making a performance which induces improvisation from a formula, that is, from a task, rather than pursuing a process which gradually trims improvisation into a formula, that is, into 'fixed' movements. In Five-Legged Stool, improvisation refers to each performer's mental as well as physical agility and flexibility in following through her assigned task right at the very moment of each performance. She makes decisions as she proceeds to fulfil her tasks, for example, 'pouring water' (p. 148). The performers are

not allowed to pour water in a different manner from performance to performance, but they have a choice of combinations or a choice in the order for the tasks to be performed (p. 148). As far as what we read in this interview is concerned, Halprin seems to handle improvisation in such a way that it will never occupy the position from which it can grow by itself as in contact improvisation. Improvisation for Halprin up to the stage of her career covered in the interview seems to be either a tool or a by-product of her main concern, that is, breaking a tradition.

#### 6.5.8 Simone Forti

Banes compares Halprin's approach towards improvisation with Simone Forti's. Forti at one time 'studied with' Halprin.<sup>43</sup>

While Halprin conspicuously regarded improvisation as a way-through and therefore was more inclined to treat improvisation 'analytically' (p. 22), Forti was more impressionistic in her approach towards improvisation, which, as Banes points out, seems to be what she learned from working with Halprin (p. 22). As analytically as Halprin's classes could get, part of the sessions focused on 'imagery' rather than on 'kinesiological analysis', letting the performers move their bodies without a pressure to 'compose' or 'to judge the movements', or 'to create any overview' (p. 22). The performers were allowed, if only during that particular session, to jump into the materialisation of what they saw or felt in their mind, and this experience seems to have paved a way for Forti's approach towards improvisation (p. 22). In Banes' words, Forti learned from Halprin 'the use of natural movements' (p. 24), which was a far cry from the use of movements



in ballet or in 'modern dance' involving much 'tension' (p. 24). 'Natural' movements, based on 'a relaxed state', did not need 'preparation' and were produced 'instinctively' and 'organically' (p. 24). Forti, according to Banes, worked on improvisation along the line of 'imagery' for four years, but then she concluded that rampant imagery would not induce much in her work after all (p. 24). We might be able to detect in Forti's dilemma the problem we discussed mainly in chapter 2, namely, the relationship between a performer's mind and her body. In Forti's case, we may suspect, the question concerns how a performer can actually materialise her 'imagery' by means of her physical self, or how a performer handles the inevitable gap between imagery and 'real' movements.

Banes' description about Huddle, one of Forti's dance pieces, helps us make a supposition that Forti seeks a breakaway from her dilemma by creating performances which involve exercise-like actions or even game elements. By setting rules for the exercises and structuring the entire piece out of those rules, Forti seems to avoid circumstances in which 'floods of imagery' (p. 24) may dominate her attention. In a sense, both Halprin and Forti at one time come to the point where they start to concentrate more on the very moment of a performance. Though this does not mean that they have come to consider less important the improvising 'process' to 'free' performers' bodies, it does imply a shift of their view towards improvisation. Like Halprin, Forti in Huddle chooses to build up a game-like structure rather than to explore 'freedom' further as in contact improvisation:

Six or seven people form a strong web by facing each other and bending forward, planting their feet firmly, keeping the knees slightly bent, and putting their arms around each other's waists and shoulders. One person separates from the structure [. . .], climbs over the huddle slowly and calmly, finding available foot- and handholds supplied by the other bodies, and rejoins the huddle on the other side. There is no particular order for climbing, but by the shifting of balance and readjustment of center that takes place when one person withdraws to start the climb, the group can immediately feel one person's intention to ascend. (p. 27)

Improvisatory aspects in this particular piece lie in each performer's sensitivity towards other performers' subtle movements as well as in her making decisions whether to 'ascend' or not. Sheer 'freedom' of a body gives way to an exercise of 'freedom' which holds up given principles. Despite their differences in initial attitudes towards improvisation in terms of theory and practice, Halprin and Forti both seem to find a kind of solution, if a temporary one, to the problem of 'natural' movements, which is made possible by setting up a demanding but not too rigid set of rules for performers.

#### 6.5.9 Lucinda Childs

Even more so than tasks or game-like movements in Halprin's and Forti's works, some of Lucinda Childs' performance pieces are quite formally patterned in terms of choreography. If tasks or games performed in a piece can function as a means of bringing out the performers' physical and mental readiness or flexibility, they can also reveal the fact that performers are still human beings and thus susceptible to a moment-to-moment change of air. That a performance piece is built up of patterns in itself suggests the choreographer's, in this case Childs', intention to



cast some light on a hitherto under-recognised side of the human behaviour. As we discussed before, 'mechanical' patterns will never be totally compatible with movements made by human performers in actual practice simply because human performers are bound to make some changes, however small, even if they try not to. A deliberate matching of patterns and humans is likely to show how human the performers actually are. This presumably will be most obvious in overt physical actions by the performers, which we may regard at least partly as improvisatory actions. Nevertheless, whether or not Childs includes such improvisatory possibilities among her intention is another question. Childs sets up patterns for her performers, whose mode of operation becomes a performance piece. Banes explains in general terms how those patterns function:

By presenting a single, simple set of movements that repeat with only slightly contrasting variation, Childs demands close attention. Some variations are based on the subtle structural reordering of the movements. Others flow from the natural distortions and limited stylistic differences she permits among the dancers as they execute the prescribed steps. Although the jumps, pivots, walks, and hops must be done precisely, the arms, head, and torso of each dancer are free to function in a comfortable, economical way that facilitates performance of the footwork. 44

As in the works of other choreographers/dancers, here again we find the use of rather mathematical formulae, which by themselves are demanding enough for the performers to fulfil. At the same time, Banes makes it clear that Childs regards her 'set of movements' not as a complete, self-contained sequence of actions but rather as movements that beget movements. This means that the performers have to let their own bodies decide on their next

action whenever and wherever the patterns do not stipulate.

For example, we can look at a piece called Calico Mingling. As Childs herself explains, this is a 'dance for four women' and it has 'four arrangements'.<sup>45</sup> Childs notes that '[e]ach time it is seen, it is more radically removed from the initial presentation' (p. 36), suggesting that the patterns set for the piece have the potential for a performance-to-performance growth not in their forms but in their materialisation by the performers. Each performer in Calico Mingling performs a 'phrase', which 'consists of forward and backward walking on straight, circular, and semi-circular paths [. . .]' (p. 36). The 'phrases' are 'completed in six paces' (p. 36). There are further rules which, for instance, enable the performers who are 'on parallel lines four feet apart' to allow 'their circular or semi-circular loops extend eight feet to their respective left or right so that a kind of interlacing effect is achieved' (p. 36). Only if the performers 'are in unison', they have to 'remain at a fixed distance' (p. 36). The 'unisons' can be made between two dancers or among three or four dancers, and they can break from a certain fixed distance to form some different distances (p. 36). The 'four arrangements' refer to the patterns stipulating where the performers position themselves against one another. The first arrangement requires that all the performers 'face the same direction', the second arrangement requires that they face the opposite direction, the third that 'two face opposite the other two', and the fourth arrangement requires that the third one be 'reversed with an additional inversion of placement between two of the dancers' (p. 36). Childs sets up such exact patterns and



makes them overlap one another so that each pattern will be 'viewed' (p. 36) from a different 'angle' (p. 36), that is, each pattern will be performed in different formations, in different sequences. In Calico Mingling the survival of a performance depends on the mechanism of the patterns themselves, which prevents the actions from spreading too thinly or interfering with one another too closely (p. 36). The performers of this particular piece then can safely concentrate on following the given rules without worrying too much about the movements going out of control. Within each phrase, improvisatory possibilities exist only in terms of the physiological complexity of the human performer, since a phrase is expected to be 'repeated' precisely. Improvisation in this piece has more to do with the four people making sequential decisions on phrases and arrangements as they perform. According to the way they use the rules, a performance can be 'radical' or, we may presume, very 'boring'. In this respect, Calico Mingling can even be associated with contact improvisation for its overall rhythmical dynamics. Despite the fact that the two are complete opposites in terms of their principles, the one having minimum rules and the other having precise geometrical rules, both contact improvisation and Calico Mingling rely on the performers' mostly instinctive decision-makings to determine how they will proceed, develop, and indeed get more 'interesting' during the moment of performance. Improvisation in Calico Mingling does not simply mean the performers abiding by the given rules while improvising. More significantly, improvisation in this particular piece means

the performers challenging the given rules not by flouting them but by producing a most organic formation and sequence out of them. Such an improvisatory circumstance, namely, a head-on collision between rules and expansive possibilities, can be regarded as an extreme case within the second category of our criteria.

#### 6.5.10 Deborah Hay

As Susan Leigh Foster points out, 'image' and 'dance' are part and parcel of one another in Deborah Hay's performance pieces. Hay sometimes makes her 'image' explicit by verbally defining what her physical movements imply:

Program notes often function as yet another voice participating in the dance, with titles and notes for dances consisting of poetic images that sometimes label the movement being performed. [. . .] These descriptions include images from nature -- 'reflecting brook', 'still summer hill', 'bird dance' or 'gnarled trees' -- interspersed with specific movement directives -- 'slow, well-paced run', or 'large sweeping movements on the floor' -- and more abstract instructions such as 'the embodiment of all images', 'arrival', or 'preponderance of the great'. The movement occasionally looks like its namesake [. . .]. More often, however, the movement approximates some quality or feature of the image such as stillness, gnarledness, or randomness. 46

Especially from the last sentence in this quote we can infer that 'image' for Hay is not some perfect model or ideal picture with which the performer tries to identify her moving body. Movements in Hay's performance may or may not 'look like' what their verbal descriptions indicate, but since any kind of visual implication, concretisation, or even resemblance inevitably involves a drastic metaphysical interpretation on the part of the performer, likeness will always be a relative and often subjective term. It seems that what Hay seeks after in 'image' is less of a visual



analogy than of a principle. Whether taken from 'nature' or being highly abstract, 'image' can be regarded as a guidance or a framework which Hay sets up. This in effect means that what Hay has with 'image' is a first-hand hint for inspiration as well as a self-made restriction of possible movements for each performance piece. If Hay decides to focus on 'stillness', as Foster describes above, we might then say that Hay has elicited a principle, namely, exploring 'stillness', from a certain 'image'.

The term 'image' then starts to assume a more pragmatic use than it might first suggest. It is the performer's body that Hay brings to the centre, phenomenologically speaking, and working with 'image' helps the performer see her body from a new perspective or leads her to a new kind of movement which she might not discover if she were not performing to a certain 'image'. 'Image' for Hay concerns the performer's body rather than what Foster calls the performer's 'self' (p. 52), which, we may infer from Foster, refers to the performer being committed, both mentally and physically, to a kind of incarnation:

The dancer is denied any transition between images that would help explain how the self evolved from one thing to another. If such transitions were included in the choreography, the dancer could maintain a certain 'self'-consistency. Hay's dances would then become the stories of a versatile dancer whose self was fluid enough to become different things. Instead, the complete discontinuity between images in Hay's dances presents the dancer as the sum total of all the contrasting images performed. (p. 52)

From what we have seen so far, it seems that improvisatory possibilities for these performances by Hay would resemble some of Chaikin's improvisatory works. In other words, we can detect some exercise-like or game-like qualities in Hay and accordingly

expect from her performance the kind of improvisation seen in the Open Theatre productions. Nevertheless, Foster also suggests that Hay's attitudes towards the mental side of a performer remain strong alongside her attitudes towards a performer's body. Hay's mind-body relationship seems to be more consciously grasped by the performer herself compared to what Chaikin's performers feel. About the importance of the performer's mind, Foster writes:

Hay [. . .] asks that when performing her choreography the subject of the dancer become as mutable as the cellularly composed body. Both body and subject assume an existence like that of 'gnarled trees' or a 'slow, well-paced run'. The subject does not become these images prior to the body as it would in a Graham dance, because the subject does not provide causal motivation for the body's actions. Body and subject simply participate in a given image together as different facets of that image. (p. 51)

It may well be that such a dichotomy between mind and body exists only within the performer's, and the choreographer's, own 'feelings' towards performance. Still, we can at least say this: a sharp distinction between 'subject' and 'body', even only in theory, is not likely to lead to the kind of improvisation that develops around a game-like principle.

Foster also brings our attention to a kind of environmental approach that Hay adopts. Here we are able to find one of the reasons why her attitudes towards performance cannot be considered without extending the area of discussion beyond the problem of body and 'image':

Deborah Hay dances with and within the world around her. She communes with the natural and social landscape, sensing and manifesting its constant change. Her facial expression, her



costume, the quality, shape, and timing of her movement -- all reflect a calm, ethereal rapport with her surroundings. She proclaims a loving openness toward the dance, the audience, and the environment by moving with grace and dignity, completely absorbed in the dance. [. . .] The dance, which may last an hour or more, consists largely of discrete phrases performed several times and then left behind. (p. 5)

Just as we find it difficult to pin down improvisatory elements in environmental theatre, the sheer fact of Hay willingly mingling with her surroundings implies the near impossibility of extracting some elements and calling them improvisation. As long as her phenomenological presence in the performance space is concerned, we may either regard her entire movement as being to some extent improvisatory or conclude that improvisatory aspects are beside the issue in the first place.

## 7 Conclusion

In this concluding chapter I will give an answer to the research question, 'What can I induce from materials focussed around the individual "creativities" that might serve to construct a prototypical explanation to define "performance improvisation"?'.

In order to answer the research question, what I first have to do is to clarify what 'performance' is on the one hand and what 'improvisation' is on the other. The next section will point to the significant findings in the Chapters 2 to 6 that reveal the elements of the domain of 'performance' and the elements of the domain of 'improvisation'.

### 7.1 Significant Findings in the Chapters 2 to 6

#### 7.1.1 On Elements that Characterise So-Called 'Improvisation'

First, we note that the question of mind and body recurred again and again in the preceding chapters. On a highly practical level, it was suggested that the performer should let her 'body' move before starting to think about the meaning of the movement. As a case in point, we are reminded of Michael Chekhov's exercises for 'improvisation'.

The apparent priority of the body over the mind relates to the apparent 'freedom' which improvisation seems to enjoy. When the performer improvises, she is in a situation which allows her to exercise her freedom within the constraints of formal or not so formal rules. The situation demands that the performer takes in the rules and shows that she is able to use the rules to her optimum advantage. The way to show such an ability is to make a concrete physical movement. For example, in contact



improvisation, the seemingly free movement of the pair of performers actually relies on the unsung 'rules', which are deeply embedded in the performers' own sense of 'ideal'.

Paradoxically, the performer can only try to achieve her 'ideal' improvisation by accumulating very down-to-earth experience which includes various kinds of training and the acquisition of technique. Such experience is 'remembered' and lived by the performer at the moment of improvisation.

Improvisation draws our attention to the spatiotemporal 'moment', or the actual 'process' of what the performer does physically and mentally. The performance of the Grand Union provides us with a straightforward example. If 'process' is to be focussed on, then this means that improvisation will necessarily be performer-oriented. The performer improvises for the sake of satisfying herself and her co-performers rather than for the purpose of presenting a 'good' piece of work to the audience. Irrespective of the presence or the reaction of the audience, the performer's own 'feel good' factor exists.

It is likely that improvisation materialises when the performer makes physical or mental decisions subconsciously, which strongly relates to the notion that the performer's body is expected to respond quickly to any situation in the 'process'. This also suggests that improvisation values 'intuition' rather than 'intelligence' in the sense that, whatever the result may be, the performer's body has to make a concrete move 'this instant'.

### 7.1.2 On Elements that Characterise So-Called 'Performance'

Paradoxically, the more we focus on the performer's body, the more profound the question of mind becomes. Cunningham, for example, searches for the way the human body disengages itself from the so-called human feelings; improvisation is intentionally avoided. The situation or the 'rules' can be set in such a way that the performer finds it difficult to draw on her improvisatory technique.

Performance may endorse or discourage improvisation, but any performance has to have its own 'intention', according to Kirby, which indicates the importance of a conscious initiative on the performer's part. By 'consciousness' I refer to the concerns that emphasise the performer standing somewhat apart from what she does: the performer standing apart is able to grasp what she does, be it an improvisation or not, in a larger perspective of 'intention'.

Performance does not necessarily commit itself to the spatiotemporal aspect of the human body. 'Intelligent' decisions often challenge the pressure of time and physical limitations. 'Intelligence' may prevent the human body from moving 'freely', but performance is not about 'freedom'. Performance needs a certain framework, tight or casual, to distinguish itself from human life itself. Where performance is, there are 'constraints' that one way or another bind the performer. The constraints offer the performer some criteria to appraise what she does.

Since performance is born with 'intention', the performer always searches for some kind of 'result' or some 'ideal'. The



result, nevertheless, is not necessarily definite like a particular 'answer' or a particular 'ending'. 'Idealism' as a kind of direction that the performer lays out and follows in practice is inherent in any performance.

There should exist a gap between the performer and the audience. Without this gap, the audience may end up being too involved in the performer's work to be able to interpret it or exercise their imagination over it. Whether or not the audience interpret the performer's action as an improvisation, the performance exists as long as the performer and the audience retain some kind of 'agreement' between them. This indicates that performance reaches beyond the 'feel-good' factor of the performer. 'Goodness' in performance implies the sense of creating a world that envelops the audience as well as the performer. Performance is motivated by such 'goodness' even though the actual reaction of the audience can never be predicted precisely.

### 7.1.3 Introducing the Concept of Binary Opposition

As we point out the significant elements that characterise the so-called 'improvisation' and the so-called 'performance', we are led to realise that those elements can be classified in terms of a simple binary opposition. In the next section, I will introduce a set of oppositional pairs that differentiate 'performance' and 'improvisation' from each other. By discussing the features of each pair, I will realign both 'performance' and 'improvisation' in a clearer and more tangible perspective than before. Finally, in the last part of the chapter, I will come

back to the question of 'performance improvisation', which will be elucidated on the basis of the detailed explanation of the performance/improvisation opposition in the next section.

## 7.2 Performance/Improvisation Opposition

A set of eight pairs that I have drawn from the discussion in the Chapters 2 to 6 according to the principle of the binary opposition introduced in the sub-section above are:

| <u>Performance</u>          | <u>Improvisation</u>  |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Mind                      | Body                  |
| 2 Consciousness             | Subconsciousness      |
| 3 Intelligence              | Intuition             |
| 4 Constraints               | Freedom               |
| 5 Result-Oriented           | Process-Centred       |
| 6 Idealism                  | Remembered Experience |
| 7 Performer versus Audience | Performer-Oriented    |
| 8 Goodness-Motivated        | Feeling-Good          |

In the following eight sub-sections, I will attempt to elucidate the domain of 'performance' as opposed to the domain of 'improvisation' by focussing on the materials from the Chapters 2 to 6 that particularly concern the above-mentioned headings.

### 7.2.1 Mind/Body

'Performance' happens more in the human mind than in the human body. This is most evidently indicated when the performer deliberately disrupts the otherwise 'natural' mind-body flow inherent in any human being. As Schechner and Mintz explained, the performer is capable of creating a situation in which the mind does not smoothly reflect the body, or vice versa.

'Performance' reveals a new dimension through such attempts of parting body from mind, which requires the performer's or the



choreographer's or the director's highly mental initiative. For example, we have seen that Cunningham makes 'rules' in such a way that the so-called 'natural' movement of the body is defied. The rules have to be carefully planned in order to let the mental initiative have its way.

'Improvisation' emphasises the human body rather than the human mind. What Melrose called 'body-thinking' applies to all, from the later Stanislavskian improvisation<sup>1</sup> to Michael Chekhov's claim that 'gestures' actually equal human psychology to Schechner's assertion that what seems to be the 'surface' feeling, such as muscles activating, can also become the feeling coming from the 'depth' of the performer. The importance of the human body which so many people point out seems to have derived from their conviction that it is easier and more effective to approach improvisation that way. For example, Chaikin's 'sound and movement' exercise was aptly devised to let one person's 'kinetic impulses' be transformed into another person's 'inner feeling', never the other way around. As I quoted in Chapter 2, 'sound and movement' was 'an attempt to work from the outside in' by '[u]sing kinetic impulses to locate inner states.'<sup>2</sup>

### 7.2.2 Consciousness/Subconsciousness

At least some degree of conscious effort is required of the person who creates 'performance'. The 'intent' to 'affect an audience' distinguishes itself as 'performance', according to Kirby. 'Performance' thus cannot let the performer lose sight of what she is doing, irrespective of the extent of her physical and mental commitment to it. The performer's conscious effort

is the point upon which people focus whenever the borderline between 'performance' and something other seems uncertain.

Langer, Thom, and Blau have reiterated the difference between improvisation which remains as it is and improvisation which becomes more than a mere improvisation.<sup>3</sup> If any improvisatory action is to be regarded as 'performance', that action must be put in a certain perspective by the performer herself. Such a perspective may take shape in the definition of the 'work of art' as in Langer or the reference to the 'recoverable' improvisation as in Thom or the dismissal of 'shallow' improvisation as in Blau. Whatever the term used in lieu of 'perspective' may be, an improvisatory action can be called 'performance' only when the improvisation does not happen for its own sake.

If we turn to 'improvisation' itself, the emphasis on the human body directly relates to the notion that the performer improvises at the subconscious level of her being. The performer's body should be able to move without her consciousness offering in-detail instructions. The improvising body must acquire the kind of versatility based on the 'imaginative use of [. . .] various mental, physical, sensory and emotional resources', as I quoted in Chapter 2.<sup>4</sup> Such versatility will be applicable to all performing circumstances, according to Strasberg, even unexpected ones. The well-trained body can react even when consciousness may lag behind.

### 7.2.3 Intelligence/Intuition

'Performance' is not all about the spatiotemporal action and reaction of the human body. Included in 'performance' is the



kind of human intelligence which directly confronts the fact of the human body existing in a particular space and time. When a person plans a performance piece, she exercises her intelligence so that she can set a framework for the performer's body to move in the space and time of that performance piece. This is like a test for the spatiotemporal aspect of the human body to go through. For example, the 'task' performances about which Halprin writes are planned to give the performers the opportunity to experience the kind of mental and physical agility and flexibility which otherwise would not be experienced easily. In Happenings, performers go through a highly 'unique' experience<sup>5</sup> which would not be possible without the very concept of 'Happenings' in the first place. As a concept, 'Happenings' may be one of the most overtly 'intelligent' of all ideas for performance discussed in the preceding chapters.

'Improvisation' derives from people's intelligent initiative to set an appropriate framework, but in the actual practice of improvisation the performer's 'intuition' prevails upon intelligence. For example, a sophisticated intelligence detected in the establishment of the principles of contact improvisation proves its worth only when the performers intuitively let their bodies move. In improvisation, the performer does not have the luxury of time before making decisions on her physical movement. 'Intuition' is a dare against the spatiotemporal limitations facing the performer. Nevertheless, intuition appears differently from improvisation to improvisation: the performer exercises her intuition overtly in contact improvisation, whereas in one of Childs' performance pieces the performer only lets her

intuition emerge through a network of precise and geometrical rules.

#### 7.2.4 Constraints/Freedom

'Performance' happens as we set constraints to everyday life of a human being. The preceding chapters have shown that constraints may take any form, apply to any situation, and be subject to any change, which all depend on the decisions made by those involved in the performance. At one end of the spectrum, we have fairly general or abstract constraints; at the other end, constraints tend to be highly technical and specified in detail.

Performances such as Happenings and environmental theatre entirely rely on the kind of constraints which, paradoxically enough, will readily accept what we would otherwise call 'accidents' or 'mistakes' or 'the deprivation of human intentionality'. On the other hand, in some of Brown's dance pieces, constraints are devised almost mathematically as in complicated game rules.

The nature of constraints is extremely important in defining 'improvisation'. Depending on the constraint, we may find it more appropriate to regard some performers' work as being irrelevant to 'improvisation' or as being beyond 'improvisation' or as the denial of 'improvisation'. For example, both Duncan and Graham exerted such strong personalities when they performed that they seemed to absorb and transform constraints at will. It is rather difficult, and possibly meaningless, to try and pin down such dancers' improvisatory actions. Meanwhile, 'indeterminacy' as attempted in Cage's pieces sometimes overtly



defies 'improvisation'.<sup>6</sup> Many people agree that 'improvisation' happens most clearly and easily when the constraints strike the 'right' balance. Constraints should be neither too tight nor too rigid if the performer is to be allowed to exercise her improvisatory 'freedom'. For example, a performer wearing a mask enjoys a certain 'freedom' which is secured by the very constraints of the mask itself. In contact improvisation, the pair of performers make 'contacts' with each other: each performer's 'muscular tone is lightly stretched to extend the limbs, although not to a degree that obscures the sensations of momentum and inertia',<sup>7</sup> as I quoted in Chapter 6. The simplicity of the rules and their practical potentiality maintain an exquisite balance, which enables the performers of contact improvisation to move 'freely'.

#### 7.2.5 Result-Oriented/Process-Centred

In the sense that 'performance' has to have an 'intended' initiative, the person who intends to make 'performance' always aims at some 'result'. At its most basic level, such a 'result' identifies with the person's sense of achievement, that is, her 'intention' having been met to her own satisfaction. All results are thus prefigured at least in terms of the general framework of individual intentions. The actual 'results' may be fully expected ones or may possibly be unexpected ones, depending upon the nature of intentions. In Cunningham's work, the result is achieved when Cunningham and other people who are involved know that the detailed plans devised for their piece have been accurately performed. On the other side of the coin, however,

Cunningham also plans an 'unexpected' result. For example, in many of his pieces, Cunningham's intention includes that the dancers and the music do not perform on the basis of a solid pre-agreement between them.<sup>8</sup> The Grand Union's performances, contact improvisation, and Schechner's environmental theatre also aim at the kind of results which are intended to be at least partly unexpected.

The preceding chapters have shown that 'improvisation' is the way in which we pay particular attention to the spatiotemporal performing 'moment'. By referring to 'improvisation', we are thus focussing on the actual 'process' of what the performer goes through in her space and time. 'Process' most clearly reveals itself when the performer has no choice but to tackle the unknown quality of the 'moment' as it comes her way. We are reminded of the fact that, as in the Grand Union and contact improvisation, many exercise-like and game-like performances are devised to make performers move around in pairs or in groups. Working with other people provides an excellent opportunity for any performer to experience the kind of 'process' which cannot be predicted with absolute precision beforehand.

#### 7.2.6 Idealism/Remembered Experience

'Performance' is a product of 'idealism'. Ideals differ from 'results' even though they affect each other. The 'ideal' performance which the performer cherishes within herself remains intact whether or not the actual, 'outside' result of a performance piece satisfies her own sense of achievement. The



performer retains what she regards as the 'ideal' irrespective of the kind of result she aims at in practice. Like a blueprint and a scale model, a person's 'ideal' performance is not necessarily feasible in a practical sense or straightforwardly applicable in the actual space and time. This, however, does not change the fact that the performer's intention to produce 'performance' is both prompted by and directed to her 'ideal'. The preceding chapters have highlighted some of the 'ideals' as envisioned and nourished by individuals and groups. Cage, for example, wrote about 'indeterminacy' and about the way he created some highly deliberate and intricately planned circumstances and contexts.<sup>9</sup> Cage's 'indeterminacy' may be regarded as one of his 'ideals', to which end he thought up elaborate procedures in the form of compositions.

On the standpoint of 'improvisation', we find that 'idealism' collides head on with both the possibility and limitations of the performer's physical aspect. Whatever its 'ideal' may be, a piece of 'improvisation' always depends on the performer's ability to make decisions which direct her physical movements. This explains why many of the articles on improvisation discussed in the preceding chapters stressed the importance of training performers or of the performer's acquiring technique. It is only when she becomes completely confident in her physical movement, which includes knowing what her body cannot do, that the performer is given the opportunity to seek after her 'ideal' in and through improvisation. Training and acquiring technique means that the performer systematically learns to accumulate

physical memories. This, according to Spolin, is 'the enriching, restructuring, and integration of all of [the] daily life responses for use in the art form',<sup>10</sup> and the performer will re-experience what she has learned when she makes an attempt at 'improvisation'. Remembered experience thus refers to the performer's ability to re-experience what is imprinted on her body. The Grand Union performances testify to the vital importance of remembered experience to be shared by the members of the group: if one's physical memories are trained to detect the others' physical memories as well, the performers manage to improvise as a group without rigid prior plannings.

#### 7.2.7 Performer versus Audience/Performer-Oriented

More than any other feature of the oppositional pairs taken up so far, the feature of 'performer versus audience' raises a question that penetrates the very core of what we would define as 'performance'. I suggested in the preceding chapters that 'performance' needs some kind of a 'gap' that separates the audience from the performer either physically or mentally, or both. In fact, 'gaps' take different forms in different circumstances. As pointed out in the preceding chapters, the concept and reality of the 'audience' may not always be clear. Depending on the circumstance, as in some 'happenings', the audience can easily mix with the performers possibly to the extent that they become performers themselves, filling in the gap. In some cases, the audience in the sense of 'invited guests' do not exist in the first place; some of the performances by Boal and his group create an 'audience' out of a crowd in the



street with or without its consent or its knowledge of having been made into an audience. 'Gaps' thus may be filled and unfilled at the performer's or the audience's discretion; 'gaps' may also be 'forced' onto the alleged audience. Whatever happens in the actual space and time, the performer's initial intention of sensing some kind of a gap between herself and others, or between her group and others, remains utterly crucial. Without such an intention, we have no performance.

The definitive concept and reality of the audience apply to 'improvisation' only when the performer and the audience share a common understanding regarding such matters as the background of the improvisation, the technical knowledge and ability of the performer, and the way the environment affects the entire process of the improvisation. As Blau writes, improvisation is 'not merely random or associative'.<sup>11</sup> The *commedia dell'arte* thrived on performer-audience rapport, relying on the presupposition that the participants were expected to tune in on the 'common' wavelength. In other words, the 'gap' between the *Commedia* performers and their audience was verified and then appropriated to mutual satisfaction. The very feasibility of the performer and the audience interacting at such a wavelength has been questioned or denied by many people in this century, as the preceding chapters have shown. Consequently, at least in the fields that we have discussed in this thesis, 'improvisation' now refers almost exclusively to the performer and her 'conduct', that is, what she physically, subconsciously, and intuitively goes through within some particular framework, which is always based on her experience. 'Improvisation' in this new meaning is

performer-oriented, less because the performer considers the audience unimportant than because she knows about the audience well enough to discard the idea of striving for a 'common' wavelength. The performer knows that she cannot rely on the audience reacting in the way she wants and that it is not easy to predict the reaction of the audience in a precise manner. Meanwhile, the performer enjoys the advantage of being on the producing side of physical, subconscious, and intuitive actions, which gives her the authority to call some of her actions 'improvisation' as far as she is concerned.

#### 7.2.8 Goodness-Motivated/Feeling-Good

I use the word 'good' here, but it is not for evaluating or measuring any form of 'performance' according to any specific standard. What I call 'goodness' means that the performer's 'intent' to 'affect an audience' is shown in overt and clear enough a manner so that other people will be able to see, sense, and interpret what she produces. 'Performance' is goodness-motivated. Whether or not the performer's 'intention' has been with her for a long time, there comes a point in time when she makes a decision to show her 'intention' to the outside world. Only then shall the performer's intention ever have a chance of becoming part of 'reality', that is, the world of the performer and the audience where any intended 'framework' will be negotiated against the laws of human nature. A rather extreme example is one of Chaikin's performances, in which he performed 'himself', a person recovering from aphasia. A strong sense of 'corporeality' <sup>12</sup> was clearly shown as well as intended.



'Goodness', nevertheless, is motivated by the performer, and the audience in actual performances do not necessarily grasp the exact nature or the source of the 'goodness'. For example, in Chaikin's performance mentioned above, some members of the audience could have been ignorant of the performer's 'intention'. In some of Boal's performances, as mentioned in the previous subsection, the audience may not even know that they have become an audience. The fact remains that such 'ignorant' audiences are still affected in one way or another by the performer's shown intention.

We have already seen that 'improvisation' is conspicuously performer-oriented. The performer improvises for the sake of satisfying her own sense of 'intuition' or 'freedom', and not exactly for the sake of presenting a piece of 'improvisation' in the eyes of other people. When I use the word 'good' in the context of 'improvisation', the word thus refers to the performer's physical as well as emotional state at its 'best'. Only the performer herself can appreciate this 'feel-good' factor; it prompts the performer to improvise, sustains her during the moment of improvisation, and is independent of an 'intention' to 'affect an audience'. Depending on the circumstance, the 'feel-good' factor functions in various ways. For example, in contact improvisation, the performer is at her 'best' when she feels charged in mind and body, that is, when she is capable of using her 'energy' <sup>13</sup> freely and intuitively while easily keeping to the rules of making 'contacts'. The performer's 'feel-good' factor in contact improvisation coincides

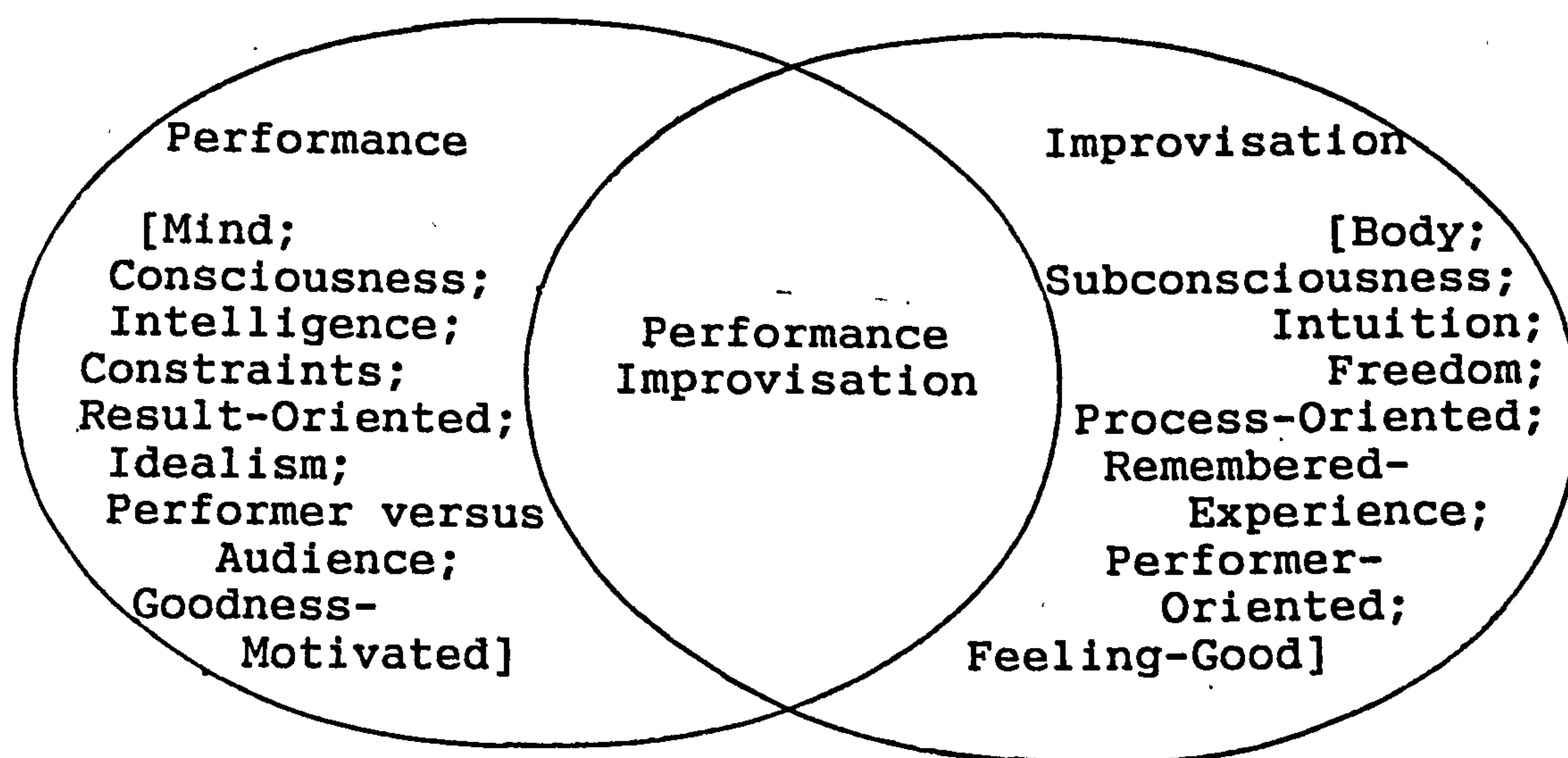
with the moment of utmost concentration and freedom as far as she is concerned. Some of Halprin's performances prompt the performer's 'feel-good' factor to be activated as the performer proceeds with an assigned task. I quoted Halprin's own words in Chapter 6: '[The wine bottle task was] so challenging and so difficult that I was quite content to do it'.<sup>14</sup> If the task demands of the performer some improvisatory efficiency, she proves her 'best' by assuming the very efficiency wanted for the occasion. Unlike in contact improvisation, the performer's 'feel-good' factor in such task performances coincides with her conviction that her improvisatory action exactly fits the requirement of the task. Other aspects of Halprin's work include her using 'improvisation' for the purpose of breaking a dance tradition. To that end, Halprin found herself trying 'everything' through improvisation. In such a case, the performer's 'feel-good' factor coincides with her 'intuition' and 'freedom' being exercised for what she considers a worthy cause.

### 7.3 Towards a Definition of Performance Improvisation

We are reminded of the fact, as was briefly mentioned in Chapter 1, that the two words 'performance' and 'improvisation' have had a long history of being interdependent in their semantics and pragmatic use. In this thesis, I first of all gave the name 'performance improvisation' to that commonly-accepted and yet so far not precisely defined area of interdependence. The purpose of the thesis has been to expose, by way of interpreting and analysing individual 'creativities', the nature of 'performance improvisation' in detail and, as a result, to offer a benchmark



for any further attempt at a more exact definition. In Chapter 1, I showed the logical relationship between 'performance' and 'improvisation' and 'performance improvisation' in the form of a simple scheme. Our accustomed assumption that both 'performance' and 'improvisation' reveal their comprehensive characteristics through interaction was indicated by the domains of 'performance' and 'improvisation' partially invading each other in the scheme. Nevertheless, the scheme in Chapter 1 only made it clear that 'performance improvisation' is a concept as well as a phenomenon intrinsically embedded in any discussion that deals with the characteristics of 'performance' and of 'improvisation'. In the course of this concluding chapter, the scheme has undergone refinement with the introduction of the set of oppositional pairs that verbally specify what characterise 'performance' and 'improvisation'. The scheme now looks like this:



The individual 'creativities' discussed in the preceding chapters testify to the fact that there is a constant negotiation between features belonging to 'performance' and those belonging to 'improvisation'. There also is a negotiation between one oppositional pair of features and another. Every 'creativity' manifests its own degree of negotiation. The measurement of the degree entirely depends on the way in which we confront each 'creativity', and here I will point to four major possible ways.

First, we can look either at the entire piece of any 'work', for example, the whole duration of a Grand Union performance piece, or at each single 'moment' of a piece of 'work', for example, a brief and fragmentary moment within a Grand Union performance piece. Second, we can focus either on the 'experience' per se or on the supra-'experience'. The 'experience' per se refers to what people go through during some moment of a piece of work or during a piece of work as a whole. Since the genuine 'experience' per se would not easily yield to a systematic interpretation and analysis without the help of some scientific research tools, for example, those that enable us to see which part of the brain is active, our focussing on the 'experience' per se mainly concerns people's anecdotes of the 'experience'. Our focussing on the supra-'experience', on the other hand, concerns those comments and writings which do not particularly centre around people's experience itself. For example, some of Kirby's writings on Happenings and some of Cage's writings on his performance pieces describe the 'experience' per se in detail, while their other writings on the same subjects describe the supra-'experience' rather than the



'experience' itself. Third, we can either consult what the performer writes and says about her own work or stay away from the performer's comments. The performer-oriented nature of 'improvisation', for example, can be explored in depth if we select the material carefully according to the position of the writer, that is, if she is herself the performer of the work or not. Lastly, we can either focus on the production of a 'moment' and a piece of work or on the appreciation of those. At first glance, we might be inclined to regard the production of a work as solely concerning the performer and the appreciation of the work as mainly concerning the audience. The situation, in fact, is more complicated. As we have seen in the main chapters and also in the previous section of this chapter, the performer also appreciates her own work, for example, by evaluating the physical movement she has made. Some pieces of work, on the other hand, expect the audience to participate in the 'work' in such a way that they end up becoming 'performers'.

Whichever way we adopt, we look at each 'creativity' in order to measure the degree of negotiation between the features and between the oppositional pairs. What I would call a 'vertical negotiation' emphasises or represses some particular oppositional pairs. For example, we might regard some particular moment of a piece of work as being almost irrelevant to both the 'goodness-motivated' feature and the 'feel-good' feature. On the other hand, what I would call a 'horizontal negotiation' emphasises or represses one of the features of an oppositional pair. For example, some particular piece of work might as a whole be

regarded as putting more emphasis on the 'process' than on the 'result'. It is important to point out that all the features of the eight oppositional pairs are considered present at any rate in any single 'creativity'.

Each individual 'creativity' considered for discussion in the thesis has proven in the main chapters to be a nebulous intertwinement of 'performance' and 'improvisation'. I have attempted to elucidate the nature of intertwinement in this concluding chapter, which has culminated in eliciting the eight pairs of oppositional features. Future attempts at a definition of performance improvisation will concentrate their efforts on the actual dynamics of the intertwinement in each individual 'creativity'. Of special interest will be the degrees of negotiation between 'performance' and 'improvisation' as mentioned in the paragraphs above.

Finally, it is when we have made a considerable progress in our attempts at exploring and unmasking the dynamics of the intertwinement that we will have firmly in our grasp a convincing definition of 'performance improvisation' which is no longer a mere interaction of 'performance' and 'improvisation' but has become an honest reflection of that quintessential quality treasured by all the writers of the materials we have read in this thesis and by others as well. The enormous range and the surprisingly subtle variety of 'creativities' that we have seen will continue to remind us that people indeed try out every possible means to seek the quintessence, which they consider more than merely worthwhile.



## Notes

## Notes to Chapter 1

1

Jane Austen, Mansfield Park, ed. by Tony Tanner (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 148.

2

See Umberto Eco, Six Walks in the Fictional Woods (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 15-16 for the term 'model reader'.

3

Andrew Radford, Transformational Grammar: A First Course (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 3.

4

Sachiko Ide and others, 'Chomsky-Riron to Kanrenryoiki' in Chomsky Shojiten, ed. by Kunihiro Imai (Tokyo: Taishukan, 1986), pp. 219-50.

5

Gérard Genette, The Work of Art: Immanence and Transcendence, trans. by G. M. Goshgarian (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 2.

6

See Note 15 in this chapter for problems with translations.

7

Stanley Cavell, Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), p. 201.

8

See Note 15 in this chapter for problems with translations.

9

Jacques Derrida, Points . . ., ed. by Elisabeth Weber, trans. by Peggy Kamuf and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 32.

10

Steen Eiler Rasmussen, Experiencing Architecture (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1962), p. 12.

11

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13

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14

See Note 15 below for problems with translations.

15

The words 'performance' and 'improvisation' in English do not necessarily coincide, in lexical meanings, in semantics, and in pragmatics, with their etymological cognates in other European languages. This is too profound a question to deal with in a thesis of this kind. Questions that come out in translating English terms into other European and non-European languages or vice versa call for studies of their own. In reading English translations, it is not always clear exactly which lexical meanings the translated terms refer to, namely, whether they refer to the meanings in the original language or to the meanings in English. Unless the meanings become clear in the context of the writing or with further explanations attached to the translated terms, problems concerning different languages merely run in circles. In my discussion, I will not question the quality of translations. I will simply read all translations in the same way as I read materials which are originally in English.

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23

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12

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14

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15

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16

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17

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14

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I am one of those who are very much affected by the imagination. [. . .] I wish I could consort only with the healthy and the cheerful, for the sight of another's anguish gives me real pain, and my body has often taken over the sensations of some person I am with. A perpetual cough irritates my lungs and my throat [. . .]. As I observe a disease, so I catch it and give it lodging in



myself. (pp. 36-7)

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- 40  
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- 42  
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- 60  
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- 61  
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- 62  
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- 65  
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- 66  
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- 73  
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3

Michael Kirby and Richard Schechner, 'An Interview with John Cage', Tulane Drama Review, 10, no. 2 (1965), 50-72 (p. 55).

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This second example was pointed out by Clive Barker.

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20

See Goffman, for some difficulty in our regarding a human body 'in accordance with the framework that officially applies' (p. 35), for example, 'approach[ing] the human naked body with a natural instead of social perspective' (p. 35). On the other hand, according to Goffman, 'the body is too constantly present as a resource to be managed in accordance with only one primary framework' (p. 37). If we follow his argument, an 'officially' performing body could be perceived by some audience as, for example, a body to be touched and nothing else; but at the same time, since a human body will not easily fit into any one 'framework', such a 'pure' perception in fact will not be experienced very often.



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34

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35

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Ann Halprin, 'Mutual Creation', The Drama Review, 13, no. 1 (1968), 163-75 (pp. 163-64).

46

See, for example, R. D. Laing, Knots (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), which takes up the subject of one person speculating another person's speculation. This seems to show the near impossibility of jumping over the 'gap' between people, in our case, between the performer and the audience.

47

Daphna Ben Chaim, Distance in the Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1984), p. 45.

48

Dennis Cahill and Deborah Iozzi, 'Theatresports/1: Loosening', Canadian Theatre Review, 44 (1985), 30-36 (pp. 31-



32).

49

John A. Hawkins, 'Theatresports/2: Breakthrough or Breakdown?', Canadian Theatre Review, 44 (1985), 37-44 (p. 42).

50

Richard Schechner, Environmental Theater (New York: Hawthorn, 1973), p. 82.

51

Eileen Blumenthal, Joseph Chaikin: Exploring at the Boundaries of Theater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 61.

52

Gray, pp. 35-36.

## Notes to Chapter 6

1

Stanton B. Garner Jr, Bodied Spaces: Phenomenology and Performance in Contemporary Drama (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 49.

2

David Cole, Acting as Reading: The Place of the Reading Process in the Actor's Work (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 104.

3

Deborah Jowitt, 'Expression and Expressionism in American Modern Dance', in Janet Adshead-Lansdale and June Layson, eds, Dance History: An Introduction, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 169-81 (p. 169).

4

Joseph Chaikin, The Presence of the Actor (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1991), pp. 8-9.

5

Sally Banes, Writing Dancing: In the Age of Postmodernism (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), p. 253.

6

Richard Bridgman, Gertrude Stein in Pieces (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 60.

7

In TDR, 39, no. 4 (1995), there are several articles that mention 'performative writing'. There seems to be no agreed-upon definition of the term, but at least to some people 'performative writing' focuses on the moment of a person 'performing' the

'writing', such as presenting an academic paper in a conference. None of the articles particularly uses the word 'improvisation' in discussing the term, and the point of 'performative writing' has more to do with performance practice against academic writing or against written words than performers' improvisatory potentials. See, for example, Richard Schechner, ed., 'From perform-1: The Future in Retrospect', TDR, 39, no. 4 (1995), 142-63.

8

Susanne K. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art, 3rd edn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 209.

9

Richard Kostelanetz, Conversing with Cage (New York: Limelight Editions, 1991), p. 224.

10

John Cage, Silence (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), p. 36.

11

Umberto Eco, The Open Work, trans. by Anna Cancogni with an Introduction by David Robey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 3.

12

Michael Kirby, 'On Acting and Not-Acting', The Drama Review, 16, no. 1 (1972), 3-15 (p. 13).

13

Clive Barker, 'When the Kissing Stopped . . . and What Happened Next', New Theatre Quarterly, vol. 4, no. 14 (1988), 144-51.

14

Cole, p. 4.

15

See Andrew Fluegelman, The New Games Book (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1978), for some examples of games which cease to be competitive against one another or the opposite team but rather prompt each player to be competitive within herself or to assume a competitive attitude collectively with the other players. One of such games is a twist of the rules of volleyball:

A simple way to transform the game and break down team barriers is simply to alter rotation. Play by standard rules, but rotate players (after both sides have served) from one side to the other rather than within each team. This liberates everyone from concern with the score and gets you into just enjoying the game. (Can you imagine playing your heart out in order to win, just to find yourself rotated to the losing side in time for the final point?) It's sort of



like playing against yourself -- in order to up the score on either side, you've got to give your all. And that's the whole idea. (p. 113)

16

Christine Poulter, Playing the Game (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 27.

17

Augusto Boal, Games for Actors and Non-Actors, trans. by Adrian Jackson (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 60.

18

Georgiana Gore, 'Traditional Dance in West Africa', in Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, pp. 59-80 (p. 59).

19

Banes, p. 11.

20

Sally Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance (Boston: Houghton, 1979), p. 2.

21

Jowitt, p. 170.

22

Jowitt, p. 170.

23

Roger Copeland, 'Beyond Expressionism: Merce Cunningham's Critique of "the Natural"', in Adshead-Lansdale and Layson, pp. 182-97 (p. 193).

24

Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers, p. 7.

25

Merce Cunningham, The Dancer and the Dance, in conversation with Jacqueline Lesschaeve (New York: Marion Boyars, 1985), p. 20.

26

Copeland, p. 192.

27

Cunningham, p. 21.

28

Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers, p. 13.

29

Steve Paxton, 'The Grand Union', The Drama Review, 16, no. 3 (1972), 128-34 (p. 128).

30

Susan Foster, 'The Signifying Body: Reaction and Resistance in Postmodern Dance', Theatre Journal, 37, no. 1 (1985), 45-64 (p. 53).

31

Paxton, p. 131.

32

Paxton, p. 130.

33

Foster, p. 54.

34

Paxton, p. 130.

35

Steve Paxton, 'Contact Improvisation', The Drama Review, 19, no. 1 (1975), 40-42 (p. 40).

36

Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers, p. 65.

37

Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers, p. 49.

38

Yvonne Rainer, Work 1961-73 (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1974), p. 298.

39

Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers, p. 78.

40

Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer, 'A Conversation about Glacial Decoy', in Lise Brunel, Babette Mangolte, and Guy Delahaye, Trisha Brown (Paris: Editions Bouge, 1987?), pp. 44-48 (p. 45).

41

Marianne Goldberg, 'Trisha Brown: "All of the Person's Person Arriving"', an interview, The Drama Review, 30, no. 1 (1986), 149-70 (p. 155).

42

Ann Halprin, 'Yvonne Rainer Interviews Ann Halprin', Tulane Drama Review, 10, no. 2 (1965), 142-67 (p. 143).

43

Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers, p. 22.

44

Banes, Terpsichore in Sneakers, p. 138.



45

Lucinda Childs, 'Notes: '64-'74', The Drama Review, 19, no. 1 (1975), 33-36 (p. 36).

46

Susan Leigh Foster, Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 5-6.

## Notes to Chapter 7

1

See pages 18 and 65 of this thesis. Unless otherwise noted, the page numbers in the subsequent notes will refer to those of the thesis.

2

See page 52.

3

See pages 141-42.

4

See page 37.

5

See page 86.

6

See page 195.

7

See page 234.

8

See page 176. More recent publications include Miyuki Shiraishi, 'Kosugi Takehisa', an interview, Ongaku no Tomo, 57 (January 1999), 147. Composer-performer Kosugi says that his composition in a Cunningham production is not intended for 'accompanying the dance in the first place' [my translation].

9

See pages 195-96.

10

See page 132.

11

See page 132.

12  
See page 155.

13  
See page 234.

14  
See page 252.



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